

**Strategic Value Co-creation on Social Media in Semi-professional Sports Clubs**

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I confirm that the word count of this thesis is less than 100,000 words.

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## **Abstract**

Social media has emerged as an important marketing channel for sports clubs. The overall aim of this research study is to investigate social media application in semi-professional sports clubs (SSCs) to evaluate how value co-creation can be facilitated between a club and its fans.

The research investigates both SSC and fan perspectives to evaluate how value is co-created between both, and how social media can be utilised to facilitate value co-creation. Literature was reviewed to illustrate the context of this research, and to identify key characteristics of clubs that impact on their utilisation of social media. Relevant marketing literature was reviewed to identify the role of social media in SSC marketing, to provide an understanding of value co-creation in this context.

The study consisted of eight cases conducted with teams from the Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL). Within each case in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with fans of the club to evaluate value from their perspective. In-depth semi-structured interviews were also conducted with social media managers or the volunteers responsible for social media within the club, to gain insights into the perspective of SSCs on value they experience through social media application. Data was analysed and presented, with cross-case comparisons drawn.

This research builds upon value co-creation theory in the context of SSCs. Value is co-created on social media between SSCs and fans through fan engagement with content. Facilitating this engagement is vital in overcoming resource limitations at a practical level. Fans undergo a decision making process in relation to engaging with content on social media. Three forms of motivation within this process were identified. These were self-interest, altruism, and cooperation. A strategic framework was developed from the findings of this study which identifies the barriers and value for club and fans. The framework highlights conditions SSCs need to meet with their social media content to facilitate engagement with fans, so that mutual value emerges. Additionally, it was discovered that varying levels of behavioural loyalty in SSC fans does not impact upon the likelihood of engagement with content. Therefore, this research develops knowledge regarding fans of SSCs' use of social media.



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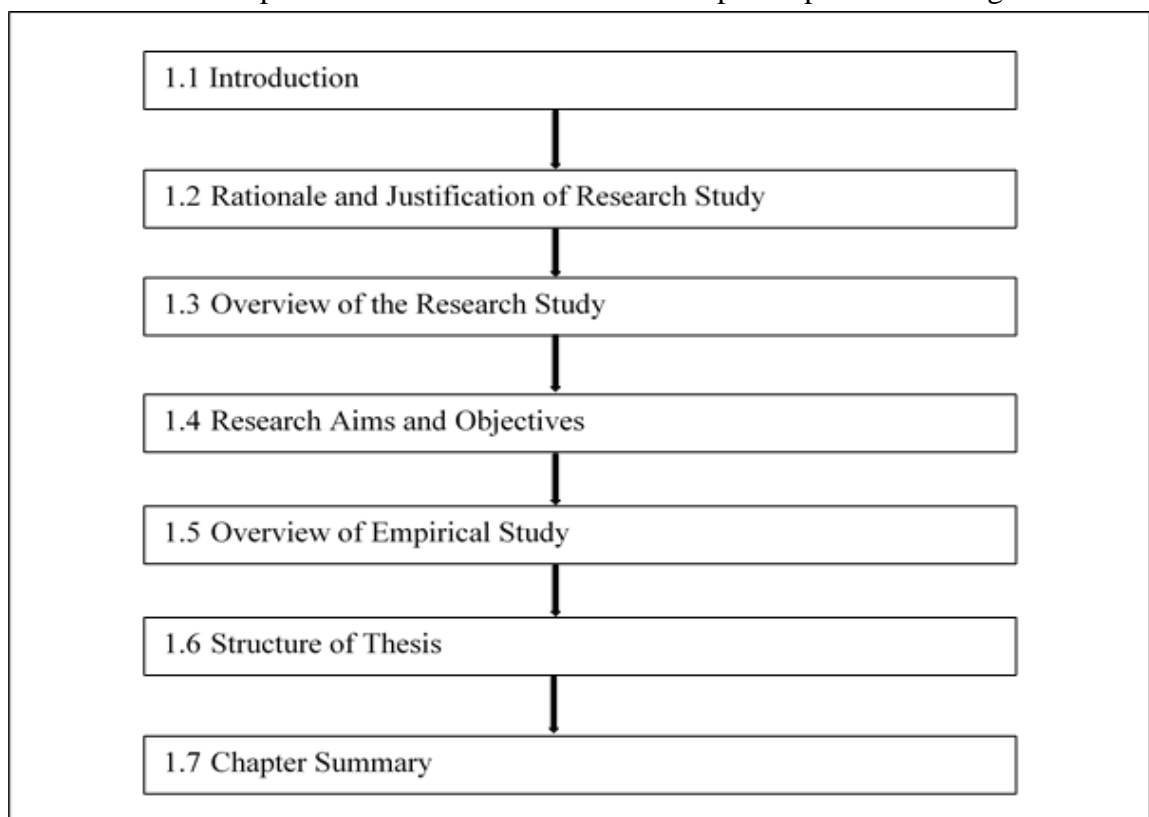
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## **1.0. CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

### **1.1. Introduction**

This thesis presents research evaluating how social media can be used to facilitate value co-creation between semi-professional sports clubs (SSCs) and sports fans. Eight clubs from the Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) were selected as cases for the empirical study. Within the thesis, relevant literature is reviewed to underpin the research objectives. The research evaluates how social media can be utilised in SSCs to help achieve business objectives, while simultaneously creating value for fans. Furthermore, this research evaluates how sports fans are motivated to engage with content.

This chapter provides an overview of the thesis and its purpose in presenting research regarding value co-creation using social media in SSCs. The research aims and objectives are introduced and discussed with justification of their relevance to the research topic. The methodology for empirical research which uses a qualitative case study approach is outlined. A synopsis of each case study is provided, and the structure of the thesis is also presented. The structure of this chapter is presented in figure 1.1.



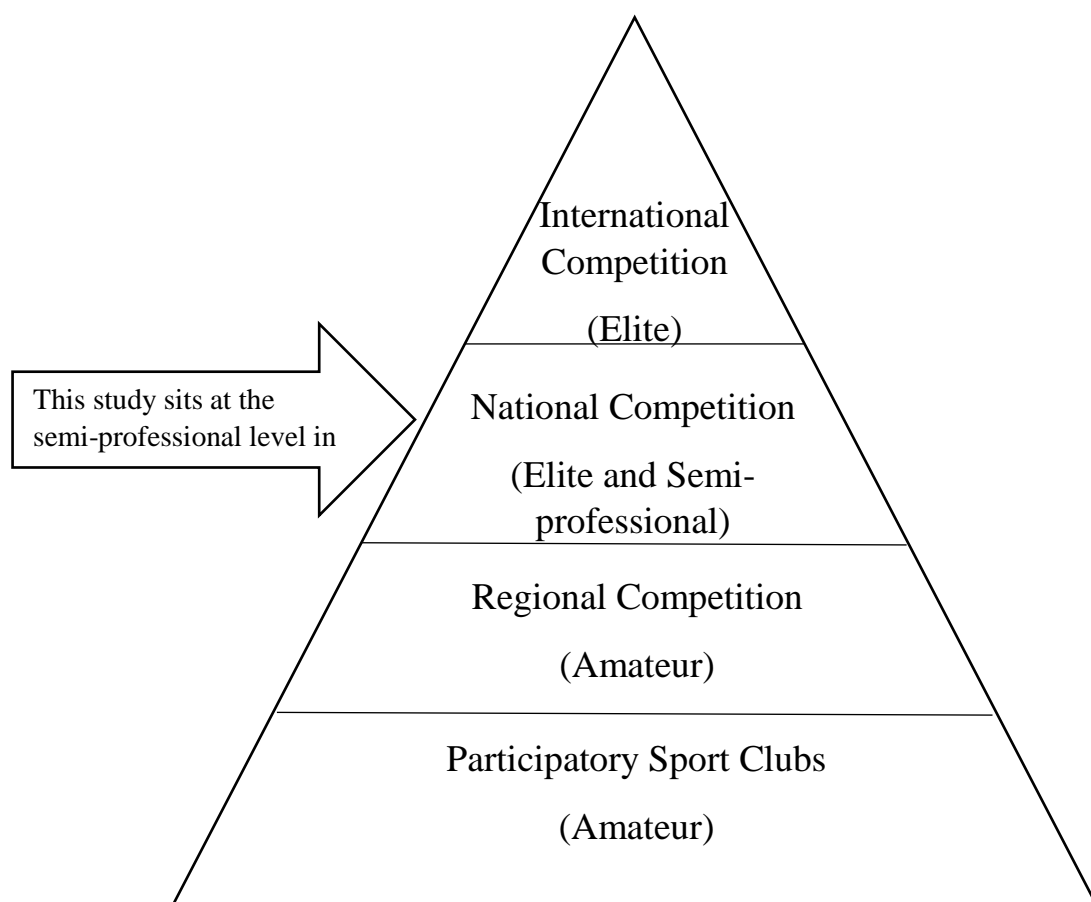
**Figure 1.1 – Introduction Chapter Structure**

## **1.2. Rationale and Justification of Research Study**

In order to compete within increasingly competitive and commercialised markets it is important that sports organisations adopt a strategic approach to their marketing activities (Thibault et al., 1993; Thibault et al., 1994; Ferkins et al., 2009; Ratten, 2010; Skirstad and Chelladurai, 2011; Dowling et al., 2014). A large amount of sport marketing literature has focused on the elite level of sport (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010; Waters et al., 2011; Pfahl et al., 2012; O'Shea and Alonso, 2012; Stavros et al., 2014), the amateur, grassroots, or participatory level (Enjolras, 2002; Nichols et al., 2005; Thiel and Mayer, 2009; Wicker and Breuer, 2011; Breuer et al., 2012), and on governing bodies (Forster, 2006; Papadimitriou, 2007; Ferkins et al., 2009; Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011; Ferkins and Shilbury, 2012; Eagleman, 2013; Thompson et al., 2014; Hambrick and Kang, 2015). However, there is limited research at the interface between amateur and elite sport, where SSCs suffer from resource limitations similar to amateur clubs, while aspiring to compete at a higher level (Gallagher et al., 2012). The purpose of this study is to address this gap. Conducting research into communication between fans and clubs will provide grounding for a planned approach to social media usage in SSCs. This strategic approach to marketing is required to make efficient use of the limited resources available to SSCs (Thibault et al., 1993; Thibault et al., 1994; Wicker and Breuer, 2011).

The working definition for a SSC in this research is: *a semi-professional sports club which operates as a profit-for-development organisation, has paid professional athletes or players, relies on volunteer support staff, and aspires to compete at higher levels of sport by developing the club through business practices* (Gallagher et al., 2009; Gilmore et al., 2011; Gallagher et al., 2012). This definition is built upon small business literature, and highlights that SSCs operate with limited resources such as time, capital and human resources. These are characteristics that are consistent with small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) (Gallagher et al., 2009; Gilmore et al., 2011; Gallagher et al., 2012). Therefore, it can also be assumed that marketing in semi-professional sports clubs will share SME characteristics (Moore and Levermore, 2012). In other words, marketing will be informal or limited by resources such as funding and managerial competence (Gilmore et al., 2011).

Due to the aspirations of clubs to improve their competitive standing, it is imperative that they improve overall marketing of the club, and to gain access to recognised, elite competitions within their sport. For example, clubs within the Northern Ireland Football League have potential access to the Champions League, a competition acknowledged as the pinnacle of European football competition (Koning, 2009). This is shown in figure 1.2. Through the improvement of marketing and increased commercialisation in SSCs, clubs can gain increased resources to develop the club and improve consistency in achieving access to elite level competitions (Enjolras, 2002). It has been noted within the literature that developing a relational approach to marketing by co-creating value in sports clubs is beneficial to their strategic development (Ferrand and McCarthy, 2009; Nufer and Bühler, 2010; Williams and Chinn, 2010; Y. K. Kim and Trail, 2011; G. Gray and Wert-Gray, 2012; Magnussen et al., 2012; Abeza et al., 2013). Current academic research does not focus on how this value co-creation can be facilitated through social media application within SSCs.



**Figure 1.2 - Structure of Sporting Competition. Adapted from Enjolras (2002).**

Social media has become a popular marketing communications channel for sports organisations as the widespread accessibility of the internet has grown within society (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Thompson et al., 2014). The social media channels most frequently researched from an academic perspective, and utilised by elite sports organisations are Facebook, a social networking platform (Waters et al., 2011; Abeza et al., 2013; Stavros et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2014; Dixon et al., 2015), and Twitter, a micro-blogging platform (Hambrick, 2012; Abeza et al., 2013; Dixon et al., 2015). There are additional channels utilised in elite level sport, such as Instagram and Pinterest (Hambrick and Kang, 2015; J. K. Kim and Hull, 2017). However, due to the lack of resource in SSCs, these platforms (Instagram and Pinterest) may not be utilised effectively.

Value is individually determined, and idiosyncratic in nature. It relates to positive associations with a product, brand, service, or experience (Zeithaml, 1988). While research often links perceived value with price and/or quality (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001), this study looks at it in a wider form. It is important to look at multiple perspectives when discussing value, as it is individually determined. In relation to this piece of research, this means that the perspective of club value and fan value both need to be evaluated as interaction or engagement occurs between these parties on social media. Due to the inherent interactivity of social media, these platforms provide an interface where value can be co-created (Williams and Chinn, 2010; O'Shea and Alonso, 2012). Therefore, it is important that clubs understand what content can be provided to facilitate the co-creation of value with their fans in order to develop these relationships (Eagleman, 2013; Uhrich, 2014). This will provide the basis for a strategic approach to social media application to be developed within SSCs.

Value co-creation has developed from service dominant logic; value can be co-created between a service provider and consumer through interaction and communication (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Payne et al., 2008; Vargo, 2008; Vargo et al., 2008; Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Vargo, 2009; Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Grönroos, 2012; Gummerus, 2013). Multiple actors are involved in the co-creation of value in sport through an ecosystem of value networks (Woratschek et al., 2014). For example, within sport value can be co-created between the clubs, their fans, local businesses, the league or governing body and other actors (Durchholz and

Woratschek, 2011; Hajli and Hajli, 2013; Castro-Martinez and Jackson, 2015). Value co-creation result in the emergence of mutual value for actors that interact with each other (Dean and Alhothali, 2017). An approach to social media use within sports clubs that focuses on co-creating value may cause greater value to be experienced for both the club and its fans (Uhrich, 2014). No existing research evaluates how value co-creation can be used as a strategic approach to social media application within SSCs. In order to achieve this, there is a need to develop an understanding of value from the perspective of both club and fans in relation to social media content.

### **1.3. Overview of the Research Study**

The research study will be conducted with fans and social media managers in eight teams within the Northern Ireland Football League. This league system is comprised of three tiers: Premiership, Championship and Intermediate. Both Premiership and Championship fit within the national competition segment in figure 1.2. Teams within these leagues are semi-professional; they have paid players and are operated primarily by volunteers. All clubs have access to the highest tier of football competition by achieving first place in the Premiership. Through development of the club, larger sums of capital can be gained by competitions that will allow access to higher quality players, increasing the likelihood of regular access to the competition. Therefore, all clubs within the top tier of the Northern Ireland Football League and several existing in the Championship exist as clubs in development, and are aiming to improve on their existing business practices. Eight clubs have been chosen as cases from the Northern Ireland Football League to provide an insight on social media application at different clubs. These teams fit within the working definition of a SSC, as they are semi-professional in nature, and both aspire and have access to the highest tier of sporting competition. The theoretical outcomes for this research will aid the development of a strategic framework to help clubs develop a planned approach to social media marketing that is both effective at achieving organisational goals, and efficient in terms of utilising resources, and thus facilitating value co-creation.

#### **1.4. Research Aims and Objectives**

The overall aim of this research study is to investigate social media application in SSCs to evaluate how value co-creation can be facilitated between a club and its fans. A review of literature relevant to social media marketing will help to identify the key facilitators of value co-creation between club and fans on social media. A strategic framework will be developed from this research to illustrate the factors involved in value co-creation on social media between a SSC and its fans. Existing research does not address how value co-creation occurs on social media and the key factors involved in this within semi-professional sport. Three research objectives have been identified to establish how social media can be used to facilitate value co-creation. Each objective and their relevance and justification will be discussed below.

##### **1.4.1. Research Objective One**

*ROI: To evaluate the motivations of fans in their engagement with content from a SSC's social media communication.*

The purpose of research objective one is to identify the values which motivate fan engagement with social media from semi-professional sports clubs. Fans experience value that can motivate their social media behaviour to engage with content (Witkemper et al., 2012; Stavros et al., 2014). However, fans can vary in levels of loyalty, and as such have different motivations for engaging with content. When an individual interacts with content on social media, the content disseminates through their existing network. Therefore, this increases the size of the audience that the original social media content reaches (Gorgani, 2016). In order to create mutual value, clubs need to understand how fans perceive value on social media and how content is used by fans in order for the club to receive value itself. Research objective one will address how fans evaluate value, and aid the subsequent development of a strategic framework for SSCs use of social media to provide these values and satisfy fan needs.

#### **1.4.2. Research Objective Two**

*RO2: To evaluate the perceived value of social media use and application as a marketing communications channel from the SSC's perspective.*

Research objective two focuses on evaluating the perceived value of using social media as a marketing communications channel for SSCs. This research objective addresses the evaluation of value from a club's perspective by interviewing the social media manager and by considering current practice. Relevant marketing literature suggests that financial and communicative values are important in the context of social media application, if SSCs are aiming to develop business practices (O'Shea and Alonso, 2012; Abeza et al., 2013; Dixon et al., 2015). Through effective use of social media, organisations can generate greater levels of awareness and ultimately generate increased revenue through their social media application. This study will evaluate the SSCs perspectives on the impact and use of social media within semi-professional sports clubs in Northern Ireland.

#### **1.4.3. Research Objective Three**

*RO3: To compare fans' and SSCs' perspectives regarding social media use to identify causes and barriers to co-creating value on social media between fans and clubs.*

Research objective three evaluates and compares fans' and SSC's perspectives regarding social media use, and identifies the causes and barriers to proactive social media application within clubs. Understanding the evaluation of the process of value co-creation on social media from both perspectives (club and fans) simultaneously is important before a strategic framework can be developed. In other words, it will focus on identifying how current practice is facilitating or limiting the potential perceived value for fans and for the club. By comparing the findings from RO1 and RO2, perceived values for both club and fans can be evaluated. This research proposes that fan engagement on social media is central to value co-creation. This needs to be considered in the context of club objectives, and the limited resources available within SSCs. Existing research does not evaluate how value co-creation occurs on social media and the key factors involved in this within semi-professional sport. Building on the findings from RO1 and RO2 a framework will be developed, this will illustrate the



processes from a fan's perspective that leads to engagement and the consequential value for SSCs. SSCs' social media managers need to develop strategies for efficient and effective use as a marketing communications channel. This is a pertinent issue in sport on a wider scale, as many semi-professional organisations lack capital, and thus must use social media in an efficient manner that facilitates organisational goals while simultaneously providing value to their fans (Moore and Levermore, 2012).

## **1.5. Overview of Empirical Study**

The empirical research consists of two stages of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The study involves eight cases, conducted with semi-professional football teams that operate within the Northern Ireland Football League. These clubs have access to the top tier of football, through qualification for the UEFA Champions League making them appropriate cases for this study. A characteristic of the SSC is that it may compete at the highest tier of competitive sport through application of business development practices. Therefore, each of these clubs has the ability to compete within the Champions League through domestic league success, displaying the necessity for improved social media marketing to achieve business objectives.

Stage one of the data collection was conducted with twenty fans of the clubs in order to meet RO1, and to contribute to the achievement of RO3. The in-depth interviews focused on evaluating fan value on social media, and the key motivations and processes behind their engagement with content on these channels from semi-professional football clubs. Stage two of the data collection consisted of ten semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten social media managers at the clubs. The purpose of these interviews was to address RO2 identifying perceived value, and how social media is utilised as a marketing communications channel. The data collected was also utilised to address RO3 through the development of a strategic framework. Each case is introduced below.

## **1.6. Structure of Thesis**

This thesis contains seven chapters. This chapter (one) has provided an introduction to the empirical research study.

Chapter two presents literature regarding the sporting context, and analyses both amateur and elite sport to clarify the focus of this study on semi-professional sports.

Chapter three provides a review of literature related to marketing, sports marketing, and value co-creation. It discusses fan loyalty and value in sports and contributes to the development of a conceptual model to guide the empirical research.

Chapter four presents the methodology for the empirical research study, and describes the process used for data analysis. It reviews qualitative research methods and justifies their choice for this research. An interpretivist approach has been used with the data being presented in case study format.

Chapter five includes analysis of the findings from research stage one. This uses cross-case analysis to present analysis related to RO1.

Chapter six presents the findings of the research study in the form of case studies. Two cases are presented in this chapter, with the other six presented in the same format in the appendices section of this thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the relevant findings relating to the research objectives.

Chapter seven presents a cross-case analysis of data collected from research stage two. The analysis of data from interviews with SSC representatives focused on addressing RO2 and RO3.

Chapter eight provides a discussion of the key findings in relation to existing research, and highlights areas of contribution to knowledge that results in both theoretical and managerial implications.

Chapter nine provides a conclusion to the thesis. It discusses the research objectives and how they have been addressed by the research. The chapter also evaluates the key contributions to knowledge, an overview of future research and limitations of this research study.

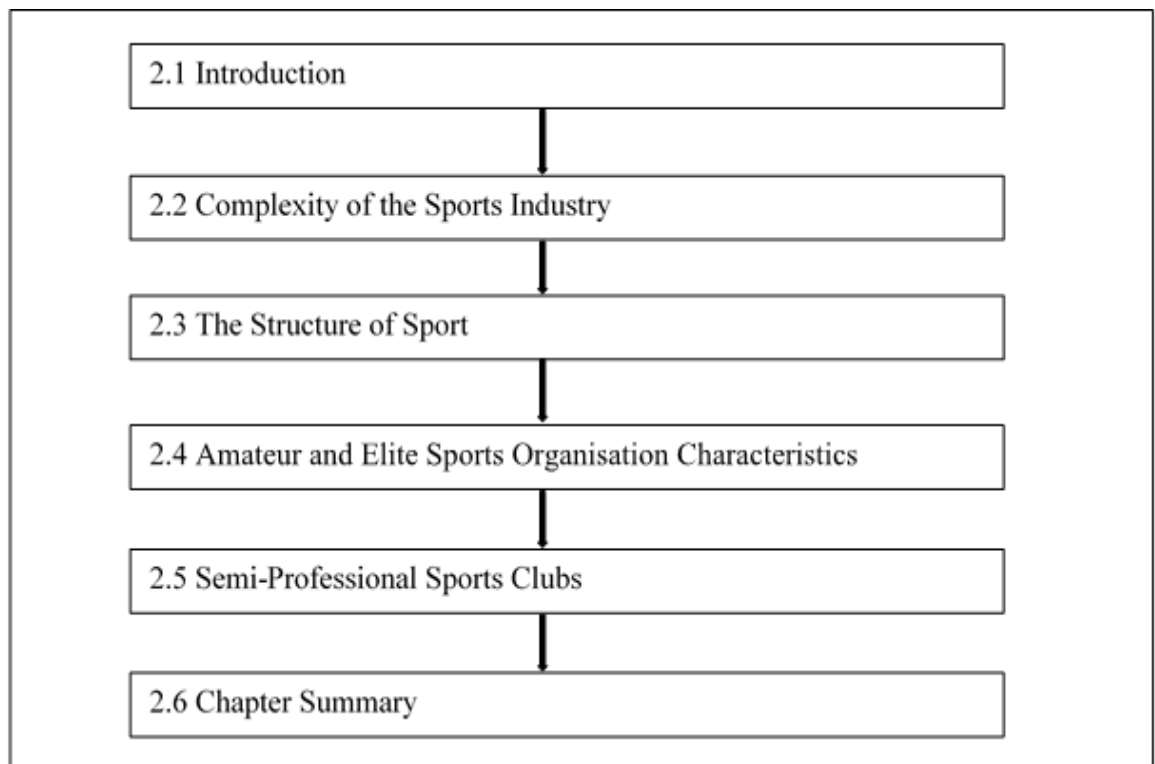
## **1.7. Chapter Summary**

The structure of the thesis was presented in this chapter. This has provided an introduction to the thesis by delivering an overview of the research topic, research methods, research objectives and case studies. This research investigates how social media can be utilised by semi-professional sports clubs to co-create value with their fans. In the following chapter, relevant literature will be reviewed to develop a conceptual model which guides the empirical research.

## **2.0. CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review of the Sports Industry as the Research Context**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter will review literature in order to develop an understanding of the semi-professional sports context, and to highlight the necessity for greater levels of academic research at this level. A comparison of elite and amateur sports organisations illustrates the gap at which SSCs operate. A discussion on the key characteristics of SSCs is also provided which aids in the understanding of the context in which the empirical study is conducted. The structure of this chapter is presented in fig 2.1.



**Figure 2.1 – Structure of Chapter Two: Literature Review of the Sports Industry as the Research Context**

### **2.2. Complexity of the Sports Industry**

The sports industry is highly diverse in nature, and consists of many organisations with varying goals and objectives that satisfy different market segments. A sports organisation is a social entity involved in the sport industry; it has goals and objectives that are achieved through a structured system that has clearly identifiable boundaries

(Slack and Parent, 2006). However, there are many issues in categorising and segmenting sports industries due to the diverse nature of sports. Chelladurai (2013) suggests that sport can be classified into three categories: egalitarian sport, elite sport and entertainment sport. Differing organisational values allows sport to be segmented into these categories (Hinings et al., 1996).

Within this study, egalitarian sport is referred to as amateur sport due to participation being a key focus of sport at this level (Slack, 1985; Thibault et al., 1993; Nichols et al., 2005). Elite level sport has higher levels of funding and financial investment. One reason for this is through increased levels of international sporting competition, which receives higher levels of spectatorship and external investment (De Bosscher et al., 2010). This research proposes that both amateur and elite sport consumption (from spectatorship) is driven by entertainment, as opposed to entertainment sport existing as a separate category. However, this does not mean that all elite and amateur sport is consumed as entertainment; for example, amateur sport often lacks spectatorship (Mason, 1999).

Entertainment is at the core of the value proposition for multiple forms of sport to spectators following the event on potentially multiple channels including match attendance, television, or radio. Sport and entertainment have been converging due to the opportunities created for brand development and commercialisation (Carter, 2010). Sport consumed as entertainment can be formed through competitive and team sports, whose sport product on offer is created through co-opetition where multiple teams or leagues meet to take part in a competitive match or game (Mason, 1999). Consumption at the elite and semi-professional level is driven through spectatorship when compared to amateur sport, which is participation driven. In order for clubs at this level to develop, a focus is put on increasing levels of spectatorship (Mason, 1999). There are many factors that have an influence on spectatorship which must be identified and addressed before a strategic approach to management and development can be undertaken. Sport is consumed as entertainment when spectating a sporting event or context between multiple teams or athletes provides benefit (or value) to the individual spectating (Enjolras, 2002). Sport can be consumed in multiple ways: through in-person spectatorship (also referred to as match day attendance), media spectatorship (via television, online channels, radio etc.), through participation (an important form of consumption driving amateur sport), and through indirect

consumption (video games, purchasing merchandise, gambling etc.) (Chelladurai, 1985; Beech and Chadwick, 2013). A key motivating factor in consuming sport through spectatorship is the level of uncertainty in the potential outcome of the event. An event which has an outcome being more uncertain than another can be seen as providing more potential value to the spectator (Jessop, 2006). As sport is consumed in many ways, the organisation must be aware of the needs of the market which they wish to serve, as providing acceptable value to consumers is necessary to survive in the market (Chelladurai, 1985).

This has led to not-for-profit and voluntary sports organisations attempting to commercialise their sport product in order to improve the level of value offered to their consumers (Enjolras, 2002). Shifts in the environment in which sports organisations operate has caused them to become increasingly business-like. A key contributing factor is the increasing pressure on sports organisations to survive in a competitive environment which forces leadership to develop the organisation to become self-sufficient (Gammelsæter, 2010). Shilbury and Ferkins (2011) have also attributed the transition within sport from a participation-driven industry to a business-like sector due to the implementation of business management practices, and an increasing focus on increasing revenue for sustainability and organisational development. This will aid clubs in dealing with a decreased amount of government spending at the non-elite level of sport (Thibault et al., 1994; Gallagher et al., 2016)

Clubs within open-league systems also recognise the need to increase levels of revenue, and ultimately adopt a more professional, profit-driven structure. The adoption of commercial-driven logic is associated with club growth as increased levels of resources will allow the purchase of facilities and players, and the employment of more qualified staff (Skirstad and Chelladurai, 2011). Poor facilities (such as aging stadia) can result in diminished levels of revenue (Bradbury, 2016). The successful commercialisation of sport relies heavily on understanding the relationship between national and international leagues, and fan interest of these teams. Understanding this can provide opportunities for commercial exploitation, and ultimately will increase club revenues (McDonald et al., 2010).

Modern sports organisations utilise business management and marketing to achieve competitive advantages over competitors (Christensen, 2010). There have been

arguments put forward by academics highlighting the need for a strategic, business-like approach to the management of sports organisations (O'Boyle, 2015). The necessity of innovation within the sport sector has been highlighted by Ratten (2010), who suggests that in such a complex and competitive environment, organisations are required to meet constantly changing consumer expectations and demands. This is supported by Stockdale and Williams (2007) and Reid Howie Associates (2006) who suggest the sports sector needs to become more innovative.

There are limited existing typologies within sports as there is often a hurdle to overcome in deciding upon which characteristics are universal enough to classify clubs by. Some of the most common are member size, spectator size, profitability or institutional logic (Slack and Parent, 2006). Skirstad and Chelladurai (2011) categorise sporting organisations depending on their institutional logic – the underlying objectives that the club wishes to achieve. Within this research, three institutional logics are presented: amateur, professional and commercial.

### **2.3. The Structure of Sport**

The structure of sport can be represented as a pyramid (figure 1.2). Building on Enjolras (2002), if sport was depicted as a pyramid, elite level sport would exist at the highest tier, as this is the highest achievable level of sporting competition. At the base would be amateur or grassroots sport, with its fundamentals lying in participation. The gap at the middle can be categorised as developing, or semi-professional sport, where teams and individuals aim to compete at higher levels through organisational development. At this level of sport there is a dearth of academic research as to how clubs can develop through adoption of business acumen. Gallagher et al. (2009) also present the sports industry as a pyramid. However, the authors discuss in greater detail the level of sport within the context of football, having the Champions League at the top of the pyramid with national leagues below it. Also highlighted within this article is the lack of recognition of the SSC in academic research, supporting the argument that academic literature has focused on elite and amateur sport.

Semi-professional sport lacks the volume of academic research that is conducted into amateur and elite sport. Thibault et al., (1993) recognise that this is an issue, discussing domestic sport; that which includes all sport below the elite level. However, this definition would suggest that amateur and grassroots sport is included within mid-

level sport, further highlighting a lack of acknowledgement for developing sport at its own level between amateur and elite (Gilmore et al., 2011; Gallagher et al., 2012).

#### **2.4. Amateur and Elite Sports Organisation Characteristics**

It is necessary to identify and discuss the key characteristics of both amateur and elite sports organisations in order to highlight the gap at which semi-professional sport exists. Table 2.1 highlights the key characteristics of elite and amateur sports organisations. The primary differences that have been discussed within the previous sections are shown. The purpose of this is to present a comparison, whereby these differences can be discussed in the following section relating to semi-professional sports clubs that have similar characteristics to amateur organisations, while aiming to develop into elite through the adoption of business practices.

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Elite</b>	<b>Amateur</b>
Resources (financial/human)	Abundant	Limited
Competitive Level	National/international	Local/regional
Spectatorship	Drives revenues	Limited (membership drives revenue)
Structure	Professional/developed	Limited/unprofessional
Institutional Logic	Commercialised	Participatory
Administrative Staff	Professional staff	Volunteers
Global Presence	Global brand	Local/regional reach

**Table 2.1 – A comparison of characteristics between Elite and Amateur sports organisations.**

Elite sport is that which is consumed on a global scale. Furthermore, it is often undertaken on an international setting (De Bosscher et al., 2010). National governing bodies within sport have also focused on the development of elite level sport due to the potential international recognition that can be obtained. High levels of investment in elite sport is indicative of the large resource pool available to sports organisations at this level in terms of capital and human resources. Another important feature of elite-level sport that drives commercial opportunity is the level of entertainment available because of the sport product on offer. It is suggested that due to the higher



levels of individual or team capability, there is potential for the match or event to provide greater value to spectators (Jessop, 2006). While sports organisations can operate as not-for-profit, and for-profit, it can be suggested that elite level sport will inherently be for-profit, as there will be commercial opportunities available at this level due to levels of international spectatorship that are not possible at lower levels.

Amateur sport is the lowest level of sport, and is not commercialised in nature as elite-level sport. Nichols et al., (2005) suggest that amateur sport is in the most part delivered by a network of voluntary sporting organisations. There is clear evidence of this occurring at the 'grass roots' level of sport, where community clubs and organisations form the basis of a sport delivery network (Slack, 1985). Many amateur clubs compete with others in the local and surrounding area. The club itself acts as both a way to participate in sport, and as a local amenity. Even amateur clubs often develop local rivalries (Boothby and Tungatt, 1978).

Amateur sports clubs, due to their participatory nature, are an important aspect of government policy implementation. However, as government pressures to increase participation in sport grow, so do the constraints on the limited resources available to these clubs (Harris et al., 2009). There are increasing levels of demand on amateur sporting organisation to adopt professional management practices to help successfully achieve their organisational purposes (Thiel and Mayer, 2009). Enjolras (2002) also identifies that amateur clubs are under competition from for-profit organisations that have entered the market such as those in the fitness sector. This competition is due to the fact that amateur clubs are participation driven, but the competitors are offering additional value that not-for-profit clubs may not be able to match.

#### **2.4.1. Organisational Resources**

Within elite sports organisations there are a number of competitive advantages that can be exploited, much like in larger businesses within different sectors. Wicker et al., (2014) discuss the potential benefit that clubs can achieve through economies of scale and scope. It can be seen from the high levels of revenue associated with elite sport that advantages exist when it comes to recruitment of staff and players or athletes. Elite-level sporting organisations also tend to have an ownership structure that increases their viability as a commercial entity. For example, being privately owned, or publically traded on the stock exchange (Ward et al., 2013).

Amateur sport organisations often suffer from severe restrictions on available resources. Authors have identified the two primary resource limitations as being both human and financial (Thibault et al., 1993). These issues can be attributed to the inability to hire paid staff, and difficulties in retaining members, which limits the ability of the club to sustain revenue levels (Wicker and Breuer, 2013). As amateur clubs are often small in size, they may struggle to benefit from economies of scale and scope that are available at higher levels of sporting competition, and in organisations of larger size. This is in regards to both membership and number of employees/volunteers (Wicker et al., 2014). Due to these limited resources, administrators in charge of non-profit sporting organisations have attempted to develop strategies to make efficient use of what is available (Thibault et al., 1994).

#### **2.4.2. Competitive Level**

A defining factor in the level of elite sport within a country is the structure of the league system in place for club sport. For example, in the U.S. the closed league system in American football would suggest that only NFL teams could be considered elite. In European football, open-league systems can also cause complications in defining where elite-level sport exists. Within England, the Premier League can be seen as elite-level as it is spectated internationally. However, there are also European competitions such as the Champions League which are the pinnacle of competition in football (Koning, 2009). This shows that there can be different levels of competition within elite sport (Andreff, 2011). There are, however, multiple top-tier national league in countries in Europe that would not be considered elite-level, but may also have access to the elite competitions such as the Champions League (Jessop, 2006). Features such as this cause further ambiguity when attempting to define typologies or categories for sports organisations.

As amateur sport is participation-driven, it often has less structured competition (Boothby and Tungatt, 1978; Thiel and Mayer, 2009). Amateur competition tends to focus on a local and regional scale when compared to elite clubs. Another reason for the lack of spectatorship driving revenues in amateur clubs can be attributed to by this. Sporting contests provide more value to fans and spectators when they are part of structured competition, when compared to an individual, one-off event or match. Evidence supporting this suggestion can be seen through the smaller levels of

attendance at friendly or exhibition matches in sport (Koning, 2009). League and other competitive structures rely on co-opetition between multiple teams. The higher quality of the teams involved, the more likely the competition in which they compete can be considered elite-level (Mason, 1999). Fan interest and subsequently consumption can differ between both national and international leagues within the same sport, and as such levels of spectatorship or consumption also vary. Therefore, it is important to take this factor into consideration when evaluating whether certain competitions are elite-level or not (McDonald et al., 2010).

#### **2.4.3. Spectatorship and Sources of Revenue**

Consumption in elite sport occurs in multiple ways, primarily through spectatorship and merchandising. Beech and Chadwick (2013) identify that spectatorship can be through match attendance, or through online, television and radio broadcasts. In addition, indirect consumption occurs through purchasing of merchandise, or gambling. Sporting events are only spectated when the quality of the competition provides benefit or incentive for doing so (Enjolras, 2002). There are other factors that may influence the quality of the spectacle for fans, such as whether the match is a local rivalry, or the level of uncertainty in the end result of the event. Consumption of live sporting events is an important element of spectatorship, and is one way in which key resources, such as revenues can be generated. This is related to commercialisation, where match attendees may purchase merchandise and other consumables through available revenue streams at the stadia (McDonald et al., 2010). When discussing sport consumption, Koning (2009) and Mason (1999) suggest that consumption of sport via television, or through channels other than attendance at a match, can be defined as passive consumption, and it is highlighted as being one way in which high travel costs of spectatorship can be overcome.

Amateur sports clubs are generally not associated with a high (if any) level of spectatorship due to their participatory nature. Therefore, this is a key limitation on the potential revenue streams available to the clubs, and is one cause of their lack of finances (Mason, 1999). Match attendance for sports clubs is a key source of income, limiting revenue generation potential in amateur organisations (McDonald et al., 2010). The increasing adoption of a business-like approach within the amateur sports industry may lead to an improvement in the financial capability of these clubs, as they

become increasingly self-sufficient under effective management practices (O'Boyle, 2015). In order to face increasing financial challenges, many amateur sports organisations look to create additional revenue streams to supplement their income from membership fees (Slack, 1985).

#### **2.4.4. Organisational Structure**

Elite sports organisations tend to have a more professional organisational structure, which aids decision making and consists of the hiring of paid staff to conduct managerial and board-level roles within the organisation. Professionalisation is intrinsically linked with an organisation developing a business-like approach to its operations. In regards to elite sport, this has taken the form of hiring staff with business expertise in order to manage the club off-the field as efficiently as possible (Dowling et al., 2014). Professionalisation can also be related to internal, organisational structure and the delegation of specific roles when operating the club. This signifies a move away from an ad hoc approach, where increased structure and bureaucratisation are utilised (Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011). It has been noted by Reid Howie Associates (2006) that clubs who have a business plan are more likely to operate with professional staff, and are ultimately more successful in terms of having adopted a strategic approach to their operations.

Amateur sports organisations traditionally suffered from a lack of professional structure. Pressure on these organisations has forced them to progressively adopt professional management practices. The belief is that through operating more business-like, the organisation will become more efficient in achieving its organisational purpose (Thibault et al., 1993). However, a key issue arises regarding communication in amateur sports organisations, where there is ambiguity in volunteer roles, ultimately decreasing efficiency of communication (Thiel and Mayer, 2009).

There are often large variances in the structural features of voluntary sport organisations. This results in a negative impact on their ability to meet organisational goals (Seippel, 2002). Any factors that dictate the operation of amateur sport organisations is of great importance in understanding how to manage their resources efficiently (Sakires et al., 2009). Amateur clubs of larger size tend to have a more formal decision making structure. It can also be argued that smaller clubs do not require formal management procedures as their internal structures are less complex

than that of the larger organisations (Nichols and James, 2008). Limited financial resources have a significant impact in the organisational structure of an amateur sports club. Additionally, amateur sports clubs tend to suffer less from conflicting goals, as member and volunteer interests tend to be more homogenous (Wicker and Breuer, 2013).

#### **2.4.5. Institutional Logic**

Elite level sport organisations operate with an underlying commercial institutional logic. A commercial institutional logic is concerned with the provision of sporting competition as a form of entertainment through which increased revenues can be generated (Skirstad and Chelladurai, 2011). Commercialisation can be seen an organisational purpose in some organisations due to their management and ownership structures (Thiel and Mayer, 2009). A focus on this sort of development is beneficial to sports organisations, as they will be able to improve upon their financial situation, resulting in organisational growth. A key opportunity for commercialisation is through improving the level of spectatorship. This is particularly pertinent in the context of elite sports organisations, which can create new revenue streams (Koning, 2009). The development of new channels by which spectatorship can occur, and through which sport can be consumed have added to this. For example, the ability for spectators to watch sporting events on television has drastically increased the market size of many organisations. Therefore, this has contributed significantly to the commercialisation of elite level clubs (Mason, 1999). Ultimately, through generating surplus finances, sports organisations are able to invest in players, staff and facilities in order to improve the quality of the organisation itself (Wicker and Breuer, 2013).

The focus of amateur sports clubs is in provision of a service, aimed at increasing participation. Due to the participative nature of clubs, they are often not profit-oriented (Thibault et al., 1993). Enjolras (2002) suggests that there is a threat to the underlying logic of amateur sport, as there may be pressure on the club to transition from a participatory nature, to a commercial nature in order to improve self-sufficiency and the quality of sport programme it can offer. Skirstad and Chelladurai (2011) argue that multiple logics can coexist within an organisation. It is posited that amateur clubs can be both participation driven, and aim to improve revenues through commercial logic simultaneously.

#### **2.4.6. Administrative Staff**

Through the commercial nature of elite sport, these organisations will have professional staff with expertise in business areas such as marketing and human resources (Skirstad and Chelladurai, 2011). However, amateur sports rely heavily on volunteers for operation and administration, which leads to its own unique challenges (Coleman, 2002). Volunteers are a key resource in amateur sport organisations, and have adopted both formal and informal roles within these clubs. One key issue arising from the reliance on volunteers is that they may not have enough free time to offer as coaches or instructors, and as such the club itself suffers from diminishing quality as a sport delivery system (Breuer et al., 2012). Another antecedent of the time constraints suffered from volunteers is caused by increasing government pressures on improving sport participation, as the volunteers are required to carry out more roles within the club (Nichols and James, 2008).

A primary motivation for volunteering at a sport club is the emotional attachment to, or passion for the sport itself. This means volunteers are highly motivated; however, they may also have issues with changing club practices as the organisation grows (Chadwick et al., 2008). This is supported by Coleman (Coleman, 2002) who suggests that “both self-interest and altruism” are motivations for volunteering. This limits the potential pool of volunteers that may have desirable business, or club-development related skills, such as, a knowledge of website development, or social media marketing, that can add value to the organisation’s value proposition. Closely related, are the high quality service offerings from competitors that puts pressure on volunteers in terms of adopting professional practices in order to offer comparable services (Nichols et al., 2005).

#### **2.4.7. Global Presence and Organisational Size**

Through adopting business-practices, and exploitation of commercial opportunity, sports organisations are able to improve on their economic situation. This has benefits including an increase in their level of global exposure (Ward et al., 2013). Shilbury and Ferkins (2011) acknowledge the “big business” opportunity that exists within elite level sport through commercialisation and utilisation of the large amounts of resources available to these clubs. The level of competition at which a club competes has a

significant impact on the revenues that it can generate, with successful organisations competing at the elite-level generating more income than clubs which compete irregularly in these competitions (Jessop, 2006). This is acknowledged by Enjolras (2002), who highlights that clubs of all levels, not only the elite, are becoming increasingly commercialised. However, a key finding of this research was that “the most commercialised organisations are those that are the most competitively oriented” (Enjolras, 2002). This suggests that those at the elite level of sport, which are the most competitively oriented, will have the greatest potential for commercialisation.

While academic literature has noted the potential advantages of commercialisation in sport, there are drawbacks. Chadwick et al., (2008) highlight a potential negative, being fan disillusionment. One of the issues arises when large clubs exploit commercial opportunities, through raising ticket prices or the price of merchandise. Consequently, fans of the club or organisation, begin to feel like they are being treated as a target consumer as opposed to a fan, resulting in this disillusionment. This is a key issue in elite-level sport, where clubs have moved away from community-based roots and are seen as global entities.

Due to the nature of being participation driven, the size of amateur sports clubs is most commonly measured by number of members rather than spectators. This is noted as a trend due to the characteristic of spectatorship being more commonly associated with professional sports (Reid Howie Associates, 2006). The dependence on members as opposed to spectators can lead to clubs relying on government support to survive. However, a key issue for government funding is the decision regarding whether to award it to organisations with high participation levels, but with little structure that may not be able to fully utilise it; or, to offer it to clubs with low participation levels which may be able to utilise the funding more effectively (Nichols and James, 2008). This again will increase pressure on the organisation to become more business-like with a professional structure in order to make more efficient use of the funds made available. Additionally, club size also has an impact on its ability to benefit from economies of scale and scope (Wicker et al., 2014). Therefore, amateur organisations will operate at a disadvantage from this in comparison to elite-level sport. Through adoption of business practices within clubs, economies of scale and scope may become available (Wicker et al., 2014).

## **2.5. Semi-Professional Sports Clubs**

Amateur sports organisations develop through the adoption of business practices which improves survivability. Beyond this, there has been a trend in clubs continuing their development beyond self-sustainability in order to reach higher levels of sporting competition; that is developing to compete at the top level of sport (Dowling et al., 2014). Developing and commercialised sports clubs are seen as small to medium sized businesses that rely on business practices to develop (Gammelsæter, 2010).

### **2.5.1. Working Definition of SSCs**

This research requires the development of a working definition for a SSC. Gallagher et al. (2008) and Gilmore et al. (2011) identify a SSC as one which is a member of a national league system, has an average attendance significantly below available capacity (at approximately 10%), operates as a not for profit organisation, and is operated and administered predominantly by volunteers. This definition is limited as it does not account for development of these organisations through adoption of professional practices and commercialisation. Additionally, the definition originated during a period of time where social media marketing was in its infancy in sport. The access SSCs now have to social media means that all clubs have affordable marketing communications channels. Therefore, the strategic application of social media channels allows SSCs to commercialise and develop. The definition of a SSC needs to be updated to reflect the changes in the operating conditions of clubs. This research builds upon this definition to broaden the understanding of SSCs and the context of semi-professional sports.

For the purpose of this research, the SSC should be seen not as not-for-profit, but as a profit-for-development organisation. This is because generating surplus revenues is an organisational aim in order to develop the club. Another key point is that these clubs must have aspirations to develop, and ultimately aim to compete at higher levels of sporting competition. Therefore, the national league system which they are part of must not be the top-tier of competition in which they can compete. For example, small European countries that do not have an elite-level league must have access to European elite competitions, such as, the UEFA Champions League. Therefore, the working definition of a SSC for this research is: *a semi-professional sports club which operates*



*as a profit-for-development organisation, has paid professional athletes or players, relies on volunteer support staff, and aspires to compete at higher levels of sport by developing the club through business practices.*

### **2.5.2. Northern Ireland Football League Context**

This research is to be conducted with teams of the Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL). The three semi-professional men's leagues within the NIFL consist of 36 teams across the Danske Bank Premiership, the Bluefin Sport Championship, and the Bluefin Sport Premier Intermediate League. The Premiership champions qualify for the UEFA Champions League, and runners-up qualify for the UEFA Europa League. Prior to 2013 the NIFL was branded as the Irish Football League (IFL), more commonly referred to as the 'Irish League'. A 2004 Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) report into local football in Northern Ireland found that while 38% of the population were interested in football, only 3% attended Irish League football, with the remaining 35% being classed as 'armchair fans'. Furthermore, 47% of these armchair fans cited that their lack of attendance was because Irish League matches required better promotion (DCAL, 2004). The semi-professional football clubs that form these three leagues all serve small catchment areas of fans - it is uncommon for fans to support teams from outside of their local area (Boothby and Tungatt, 1978).

These statistics highlight the potential for local football in Northern Ireland, and the opportunity that exists for clubs in increasing attendance. The demand for local football exists; through better marketing practice within clubs, this opportunity can be exploited. With the emergence of social media since the 2004 DCAL report, a marketing communications channel is available to clubs to facilitate the growth in attendance. With social media being utilised by all clubs within the league, this research is important in bridging the gap between current and best practice. Through strategic application of social media as marketing communications channel within clubs in the NIFL, match day attendance figures will rise.

### **2.5.3. Competitive Level of SSCs**

Certain league competitions are spectated on a larger scale than others due to the contest of the teams being seen as more desirable. The increase in desire can be interpreted as the provision of greater value to spectators (Koning, 2009). Linked to

this, is that the level of perceived potential entertainment is a motivating factor for the consumption of a particular league. Leagues consisting of teams with a lower perceived quality in a sport are consumed on a smaller scale. This carries issues for clubs within the league, and is a key factor in the definition of a developing sports club – a club which is a member of a league that competes at and is consumed on a national scale (Mason, 1999).

National league systems exist within countries, while international leagues provide competitive structure between clubs originating in different countries. National leagues tend not to be elite-level sport, unless teams residing from within that country are particularly successful in international competitions, or are spectated on an international scale (e.g. English Premier League) (Andreff, 2011). Understanding the relationship between spectatorship or passive consumption of national leagues and international competitions is crucial in understanding the context within which a SSC operates (McDonald et al., 2010).

National sports leagues consist of teams that play each other at least twice during a season. Success within the national league may provide participating clubs with access to competitions spectated and consumed on a larger scale. An example is that of European football, where national success allows clubs entry into the UEFA Champions League (Jessop, 2006). Oberhofer et al. (2012) discuss promotion and relegation within league systems. Furthermore, they discuss the impact of success in national competition leading to entry into international level sport.

#### **2.5.4. Key Characteristics of SSCs**

Increasingly commercialised sports organisations tend to become more competitively oriented. This is due to the increase in resources available, which allows the club to develop further (Enjolras, 2002). SSCs operate within a difficult environment, as they face external challenges such as increasing competition from other sectors. This issue becomes exacerbated due to dwindling levels of resources available to the clubs, further justifying the need to utilise what little they have available in a strategic and planned manner (Wicker and Breuer, 2013). In order for sports clubs to develop, they must adopt strategic business practices and structures (Thibault et al., 1994; Thiel and Mayer, 2009). Ward et al. (2013) also state that sports organisations require business-like approach to operations in order to help overcome financial management issues.

Developing sports organisations are aware of the need for an articulated strategy. However, they often suffer from limited time and expertise required in producing this (Ferkins et al., 2009). The SSC may struggle to strategically plan due to its reliance on volunteers and lack of business expertise (Gallagher et al., 2012). Hinings et al. (1996) considers that formal organisational structure may be seen as an indicator of a developing sports club. A further issue pertinent to the SSC is the vulnerability it may have in regards to socio-demographic changes, caused largely by the reliance on a small, local catchment area in terms of its market appeal (Reid Howie Associates, 2006).

#### **2.5.4.1. Match Attendance as a Revenue Stream**

SSCs, unlike amateur organisations are spectatorship-driven; SSCs provide entertainment due to a perceived level of quality ‘on-the-pitch’ that is not associated with amateur sport. Consequently, it is suggested that through improving the level of entertainment provided, match attendance level should increase (Smith and Groetzinger, 2010; Bednall et al., 2012). Within academic research it has been posited that if an individual attends a match once, they will be more likely to do so again in the future (Magnusen et al., 2012). This would suggest that developing a relationship with fans may be a useful way to overcome low match attendance figures associated with developing sport.

Match attendance is also directly affected by the ability of fans to passively consume the sport. At the level of SSCs, matches are often not televised; therefore, this is not a direct issue facing these clubs. However, due to their small size, they often have a small catchment area. This is a primary reason why their potential markets are small, and ultimately new ways to increase their potential reach must be analysed in order to raise attendance levels (Koning, 2009). Reid Howie Associates (2006) also support through their research, the idea that small catchment areas for the SSC is a key issue in terms of dwindling spectatorship figures. They also relate this to potential financial issues that may be suffered due to decreased revenues. It is noted that clubs may be struggling for attendance and spectatorship due to increasing levels of competition from other sectors, such as the fitness industry, or through alternative forms of sport available through passive consumption that offer greater perceived value to potential spectators (Wicker and Breuer, 2013)

#### **2.5.4.2. Institutional Logic: Profit-for-Development**

Over time, SSCs have developed from not-for-profit sport. There is a recognition within clubs that limitations on resources exist, restricting further development and growth. This puts pressure on clubs to generate autonomous revenues in order to develop. The clubs are still not-for-profit, but become a profit-for-play entity whereby any profits are used for organic growth. Gammelsaeter (2010) supports this proposition and provides the following: “we think clubs are better described as moving from non-profit to not-profit, than from non-profit to for-profit”. This description fits well with the phenomena of clubs, as profits generated are used for growth. Skirstad and Chelladurai (2011) identify that a sports club can be both not-for profit oriented, and simultaneously adopt practices of commercialisation in order to sustain the club. Therefore, it can be argued that while SSCs aim to commercialise their sport, they do not aim to generate a profit for any one stakeholder in particular; profits are utilised to grow the club organically.

Furthermore, the development of alternative revenue streams may be necessary to ensure club survival. It is suggested that although profit may not be a key requirement in amateur sports organisations, it can be a necessity for clubs to identify potential income streams in order to fund the survival and growth of the club (Ward et al., 2013). This will have implications for SSCs, as many sports organisations struggle to generate enough revenue to sustain their activities and therefore must strive to identify new revenue streams (Wicker and Breuer, 2013). Clubs that are not-for-profit may adopt business-like strategies to improve their revenues; however, the purposes and motivations behind these are significantly different from those in a for-profit organisation (Thibault et al., 1993).

#### **2.5.4.3. Human Resources: Reliance on Volunteers in SSCs**

A defining characteristic of the SSC is its reliance on volunteers. This is a key similarity with amateur sports organisations (Wicker and Breuer, 2011). This is due to the roots that these clubs have had in the local communities. However, it causes many issues for the clubs as will be highlighted. In many SSCs, there are relatively few staff paid to perform managerial roles; however, as the clubs develop over time this number tends to increase (Reid Howie Associates, 2006). Volunteers in leadership roles must

manage club financial and human resources effectively in order to facilitate future club development (Stockdale and Williams, 2007).

The reliance on volunteers causes issues for semi-professional sports clubs. Firstly, clubs may struggle to find new volunteers that are necessary to help develop the club. This can be because there is too little time of the current volunteering staff, or there is a lack of the business expertise required to help the club develop further. To overcome this, it is vital that clubs attempt to recruit volunteers with a background or education in business (Coleman, 2002). “Being voluntary, there are significant limitations on the time and focused attention individuals can offer” (Ferkins et al., 2009). This can be crippling to an organisation that requires greater human resources in order to develop further.

Another issue of volunteers is that they may not have the same interests in developing the organisation that any hired professional staff do, as they may still see the club as part of the community and developing it would be moving away from its roots (Nichols and James, 2008). There are also many administrative roles within developing sports organisations that may be too complex for volunteers to conduct, which is becoming a decisive factor in hiring paid staff (Wicker and Breuer, 2013). Business and administrative expertise are not the only thing lacking in volunteers; there may be technical skills that are not available such as website development, or general IT competencies (Nichols et al., 2005).

Reliance on volunteers is a key issue that limits organisational growth. However, it can be overcome through hiring professional staff to fulfil certain club roles (O’Boyle, 2015). Because of this, there has been an uptake of paid business professionals to take roles in developing sports organisations (Dowling et al., 2014). The process of professionalization is apparent in developing sports organisations, which has been necessitated by the economic features and requirements of these clubs (Seippel, 2002). Many sports organisations have adopted a hybrid structure between paid staff and volunteers which allows them to strategically adapt to environmental changes and more effectively deliver their sporting product (Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011). The hiring of paid staff to replace volunteers is seen as a necessary step as clubs develop (Thibault et al., 1991). Thibault et al. (1993) also considers that professional staff enable clubs to respond better to environmental changes.

#### **2.5.4.4. Financial Resources in SSCs**

SSCs also suffer from financial limitations due to the environment in which they operate, and inability to generate surplus revenues for reinvestment. Financial difficulties can also be attributed to difficulties involved in applying for government grants and funding (Reid Howie Associates, 2006). Undertaking a strategic approach to club development can use significant time, experience and intellectual commitment which are scarce at best in SSCs (Ferkins and Shilbury, 2012). SSCs lack the organisational resources to benefit significantly from economies of scale and scope (Wicker et al., 2014). Due to their limited resources of time, capital and business-expertise, many SSCs rely on social entrepreneurship to aid in club development (Gilmore et al., 2011).

Match attendance is a vital revenue stream for SSCs due to a synergistic relationship with sponsorship and media coverage (Yang and Goldfarb, 2015). However, with low attendance figures this severely limits their ability to generate capital (McDonald et al., 2010). Due to financial limitations in clubs of this size, there is a tendency for the organisation to focus on immediate goals rather than plan for long-term objectives (Thibault et al., 1993). This is at the detriment of club development, as successful development relies heavily on planning for the future. Another cause of financial hardship in clubs are reductions in government funding at the level of sport in which SSCs operate (Wicker and Breuer, 2013).

#### **2.5.4.5. Club Development of SSCs**

The SSC desires to develop its competitive ability. One way in which this can be achieved is through economic development of the clubs, through professionalization and adoption of a business mentality (Dowling et al., 2014). SSCs adopt a commercial logic to generate surplus revenues that are required to improve competitive capability of the clubs (Enjolras, 2002). Another issue exists where clubs identify the need for increasing revenue generation; however, they may not have experience in achieving this at a practical level (Gilmore et al., 2011). There has been a recognition in rugby that clubs must move away from "the way they have always done it" - in reference to the adoption of a business-like approach, and strategic plan for development to

increase on-the-pitch success, funded by off-the-pitch improvements (Nichols et al., 2005)

Organisations strive to deliver a sport product offering to spectators which is presented in a more professional manner. In order to increase the appeal of this, they aim to compete in more prestigious competitions (Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011). Through competing in larger competitions, this will in turn offer financial rewards to the clubs. This allows them to invest in better talent, increasing the likelihood that they will continue to be successful in top-tier competitions (Koning, 2009).

Due to the challenging economic situations that SSCs operate in, an entrepreneurial approach to exploiting opportunities can provide a significant advantage. It is necessary to be innovative in these situations (Ratten, 2010). SSCs will benefit from business planning, strategy development, and financial management skills. Improving marketing communications within organisations will also be beneficial (Reid Howie Associates, 2006). Clubs can develop through better financial management, the adoption of sport marketing practices and through hiring staff with expertise to manage these functions effectively (Hinings et al., 1996). Gilmore et al. (2011) also determine other opportunities such as those merging from social entrepreneurship may be beneficial to the SSC.

#### **2.5.4.6. Professionalisation of SSCs**

The successful development of SSC relies heavily on efficient operation. Clubs develop through adopting business practices that allow them to monitor the environment in which they operate, allowing the club to become an organised company (Ward et al., 2013). While Chelladurai (1985) sees this as beneficial, as it allows them to quickly adapt when external factors change, over the lifetime of a sports organisation, there is a tendency to develop a business-like approach and this constitutes club development (Slack, 1985).

Utilising a strategic approach in clubs has several advantages. It allows for clearer employee roles, more concise objectives and overall organisational performance (Thibault et al., 1993). It also aims to maximise the potential to exploit opportunities, minimises environmental uncertainty and allows the club to run more efficiently in terms of resource utilisation (Thibault et al., 1994). Adopting professional

management practices helps to cultivate success through more effective achievement of organisational goals and purpose (Thiel and Mayer, 2009). Academic research provides justification, and shows that better performing clubs rely on strategic decision making, and better organisational structure (Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011)

An articulated strategy is a vital aspect in the successful development of a sports organisation. One of the key advantages that this provides is through facilitating efficient operations (Ferkins et al., 2009). Clubs will benefit from strategy development and adoption of business management practices (Papadimitriou, 2007). Hiring professionals to aid with decision making in clubs is important (Sakires et al., 2009). These staff will utilise experience from their professional background in order to help the clubs develop and operate more efficiently. Hiring professional staff with a specialisation in marketing to develop a sports club, as marketing plays a key role in the development of sports organisations (Thibault et al., 1991). Through hiring individuals with marketing experience, sports clubs can begin to utilise new marketing communications channels available to them such as email, websites and social media (Nichols et al., 2005).

SSCs can develop through a process of commercialisation whereby they attempt to raise the mass appeal of their club through the adoption and adaptation of business-like practices. This means the club will be managed more efficiently and should generate greater revenues (Dowling et al., 2014) SSCs commercialise through increasing spectatorship and sponsorship (Enjolras, 2002). Generating surplus revenues can be reinvested to achieve growth, or to improve the level of playing talent within the club (Gammelsæter, 2010). Better playing talent is attracted to clubs competing at higher levels of sport; therefore, generating surplus revenues will allow clubs to purchase or hire these players. Ultimately improving the stature of the club and increasing the potential value they can provide to spectators (Koning, 2009) Sports organisations, while relying on volunteers still need to attempt to create new revenue streams and commercialise where possible (Seippel, 2002). Furthermore, revenue diversification is necessary to help overcome financial limitations in sports organisations (Wicker and Breuer, 2013).



## **2.6. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented an overview of the context in which this research is conducted. The working definition for a SSC in this research was also identified. A comparison has been drawn between amateur and professional elite sporting organisations to illustrate the gap between them where SSCs compete. This gap has received limited academic research, and so there is negligible guidance for the development of SSCs. In the following chapter, marketing in sport will be discussed within the context of SSCs. The utilisation of value co-creation as a theoretical approach to social media marketing within clubs will also be addressed.

### **3.0. CHAPTER THREE: Literature Review of Marketing in Sport**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter will review literature relevant to the empirical research with the aim of developing a conceptual model to guide the research study. It builds upon the context of SSCs established within chapter two. Literature relating to the utilisation of social media as a marketing communications channel will be reviewed in relation to its relevance in semi-professional sport. Value co-creation theory will be reviewed to identify how value co-creation occurs on social media within sport. How social media can be used efficiently with the limited resources available in semi-professional sports will be evaluated. Key factors to successful value co-creation will be identified to help shape the conceptual model, and underpin the research objectives. The structure of this chapter is presented in fig. 3.1.



**Figure. 3.1 – Structure of Chapter Three: Literature Review of Marketing in Sport**

### **3.2. Marketing in Sport**

Despite calls for research to be specifically conducted in the context of sport, academic endeavour in sports consumer contexts is limited (Slack and Parent, 2006). As a result, the marketing function within sport has often been limited to the remit of generating sponsorship deals (Santomier, 2008; Nufer and Bühler, 2010). Without an understanding of sports fans as consumers, or identification of what they determine as value it becomes exponentially more difficult to satisfy their needs profitably (Zhu and Chen, 2015). This research aims to develop an understanding of sports consumers within the context of SSCs, and their motives for social media engagement with clubs.

Consumption of sport will be facilitated through the communication of value propositions that are offered to, and experienced by individuals (Frow and Payne, 2011). If this value was interpreted as beneficial, repeat consumption may occur, increasing the likelihood that an individual will become more affectively loyal to the organisation (Kwon and Kwak, 2014). Developing this loyalty will result in the individual becoming a supporter, or fan of the club, team, organisation, or brand (Funk and James, 2006; Kwon and Kwak, 2014). However, it is important to understand that loyalty in sport has distinct differences in how it is manifested through fans. Furthermore, it is necessary to evaluate the multiple ways in which sports fans have been segmented in previous academic studies.

Extra emphasis must be placed on the consumer when considering the context of sport. The importance of understanding the context is necessary to create value for consumers (Horbel et al., 2016). All marketing decisions within an organisation will therefore be affected by this, including those related to the organisation's value proposition and its communication. Many sports organisations operate within the for-profit sector, and as such, aim to commercialise sport through its delivery as sport-for-entertainment. Therefore, marketing in these clubs must be concerned with understanding the customer in order to develop an effective value proposition, communicate this in an appropriate manner through the correct channels, and subsequently deliver on this at an experiential level (Horbel et al., 2016). Ultimately, providing greater opportunity for value, and communicating this better to potential customers will generate increased levels of revenue that can be spent improving facilities, resulting in a loop of revenue being reinvested within the business to

generate increased consumer value. This mutual value creation is interpreted as value co-creation, as multiple parties will benefit from the one interaction (Dean and Alhothali, 2017).

In order to improve our understanding of the importance of the marketing effort in a sports context, the concept of 'value proposition' needs to be explored, analysed and better understood in order to aid its practical application. The value proposition is concerned with the company's offering of value to its potential consumers. It is a key stage in the marketing process for sports organisations as they strive for competitive advantage (Christensen, 2010).

SSCs need to develop spectatorship if their sport is to be delivered as entertainment. Match attendance is key to spectatorship, and is the primary source of revenue for many sports clubs (Skirstad and Chelladurai, 2011). In order to increase attendance, good value needs to be offered to current and potential fans. If marketing of the improved value proposition is ineffective, clubs will not maximise their potential revenues, ultimately reducing the availability of resources to be used to improve facilities, and improve their competitive level. Ineffective use of marketing communications channels in sports has negative consequences on purchase intentions (Kumar et al., 2017; Lee and Lee, 2017). SSCs may not benefit from television viewership, as their market-appeal is on a smaller scale. Therefore, these clubs may require a greater emphasis on match attendance than their elite-level counterparts, who will generate high levels of revenue through television and sponsorship deals.

It is necessary to effectively communicate the value proposition to the desired target audience in order for consumers to potentially become spectators and develop loyalty to the organisation, becoming fans; within sports, these groups often become brand communities and develop through strong brand attachment (Popp and Woratschek, 2016). There are several factors that have an impact on marketing communications and the value proposition. Primarily, sports fans develop brand loyalty to an organisation, unlike in many other industries there is less likelihood that this will change, as many sports consumers become life-long fans of the club. Kozinets (2014) discusses links between a brand and emotional involvement, whereby engagement shows love for a brand. This is of particular relevance in the context of sport. The potential to generate consumers from a wider market who have no existing loyalty to

other sports organisations provides an opportunity for SSCs. In order to do so, effective strategic marketing plays a key role in communicating with these non-consumers.

There are further opportunities and challenges from a marketing communications perspective. For example, the organisation must find an appropriate channel by which to communicate with new consumers that have not attended/spectated their matches previously. Traditional communications channels may be difficult to utilise due to high costs, and the associated mass-market reach of these channels. On the other hand, targeting smaller market segments through social media is a more efficient approach to marketing strategy (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

A customer-centric approach to marketing is necessary for the development of SSCs. One way in which this method has been examined in academic literature is through the adoption of a relational approach in sports organisations (Ferrand and McCarthy, 2009; Abeza et al., 2013). A relationship-driven approach to sports marketing can lead to the development of increased loyalty from consumers who consequently become fans (Funk and James, 2006). However, relationship marketing has evolved as an academic theory, and now centres on a co-creative approach to marketing based in service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Through the development of service-dominant logic, value co-creation is a theory that many academics have used to explain the interactive approach to the development and delivery of a value proposition (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006). This ideology will be explored in later sections of the literature review; however, it is important to note that interactivity and engagement play a key role in effective sports marketing, and are also core characteristics of value co-creation (Stavros et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2014).

### **3.2.1. Marketing within SSCs**

Marketing in SSCs is comparable to that in SMEs (Moore and Levermore, 2012). That is marketing efforts are often informal and conducted by individuals lacking in experience (Gilmore et al., 2011). Therefore, SSCs provide a unique context of sport that may be able to apply SME marketing literature to improve practice (Moore and Levermore, 2012). However, this is an issue for clubs reliant on volunteers who lack marketing or business experience. Due to the similarities in characteristics with SMEs, managers within SSCs should aim to make efficient use of the available resources

(Gillentine et al., 2017); this is a key reason underpinning the adoption of social media for marketing purposes (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Due to their lack of experience in marketing, clubs often associate marketing with sponsorship, and the continued reliance on volunteers at SSC level often does not alleviate this issue (Wicker and Breuer, 2011). Marketing in SSCs then becomes heavily focused on increasing sponsorship deals rather than creating and communicating consumer value. In other words, there can be a misallocation of club resources as the focus of the club is not on increasing consumer value for long-term revenue (Enjolras, 2002). Even where SSCs recognise the value in increasing spectatorship, a myopic and short-term oriented approach is often adopted (Gallagher et al., 2012).

A key issue surrounding this is that fans of SSCs often cannot spectate sporting events on television, as semi-professional sports are frequently overlooked. A focus on improving experiential match-day value at the club's stadium or facilities could lead to increased levels of loyalty from fans, and increased consumption rates, helping to break the club out of the loop in which it operates (Bednall et al., 2012).

There are factors of match day experience that can be tailored to have an increasingly positive impact on the value perceptions of spectators. One area that may be looked at within this level of sport is the social aspect of attending a match day event (Clemes et al., 2011). Research has highlighted that in sport, people attend matches within social groups, many socialise with other people who are at the match, or are there to show an aspect of their personality. This social influence that appears at sporting events can become an untapped resource for sports marketers (Pons et al., 2006). It also highlights that value can be experienced at sporting events by individuals who are not fans of the team itself. Academics have noted that once an individual attends an event, they will be much more likely to re-attend in the future (G. Gray and Wert-Gray, 2012).

Marketing at the level of SSCs can face many challenges when tailoring messages for a target audience. SSCs, like amateur clubs, have local fans, often based within the community in which they are situated (Boothby and Tungatt, 1978). This generally means there will be a niche-market appeal of the organisation. Therefore, the clubs must be able to generate and communicate the value of the sport itself. Through using

social media to co-create value with fans, SSCs will be able to more effectively offer value through these channels, improving their value proposition. There are further limitations in this area, as semi-professional sports are overlooked by potential consumers as there may be a perception of less quality due to the talent on-the-pitch not competing at an elite level (Enjolras, 2002). This perception is difficult to change with the clubs not competing at a higher level of sport; however, the clubs cannot generate the resources to improve their competitive level without increasing their revenue through spectatorship.

Effective marketing in SSCs will also utilise alternative revenue streams effectively, such as merchandising and other facilities present to capitalise on match day attendance (Wicker and Breuer, 2013). Through providing additional facilities, such as areas to purchase food and drinks, consumers will have access to a better experience, increasing the likelihood of future attendance (Moreno et al., 2015). Simultaneously, the clubs are able to generate increased revenue for themselves. This approach to creating mutually beneficial value is important, as it can make best use of what limited resources are available in the clubs to maximise potential value.

### **3.3. Social Media Marketing**

There is a limited, yet increasing amount of research being conducted into the usefulness of social media for marketing purposes in sport (Filo et al., 2015). Many sports organisations have adopted it simply as a marketing communications channel, with little research having been conducted into how it can be utilised effectively. There is recognition of the potential opportunities it may provide, with low-cost communication to fans, and the ability to engage and interact with consumers. However, the need for this research is pertinent, as highlighted by Dolan et al. (2016) who suggest there are limitations regarding academic guidance to social media marketing application and engagement.

There are many social media platforms available for SSCs to utilise. However, the social media channels most frequently researched from an academic perspective, and utilised by sports organisations are Facebook, a social networking platform (Waters et al., 2011; Abeza et al., 2013; Stavros et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2014; Dixon et al., 2015), and Twitter, a micro-blogging platform (Hambrick, 2012; Abeza et al., 2013; Dixon et al., 2015). There are multiple other popular channels utilised in sport, yet it

is recognised by many organisations that these are the most widely adopted by consumers and therefore present the greatest opportunity to reach a wider audience. Furthermore, in SSCs resources are limited, which would diminish potential to utilise an increased number of channels or platforms effectively.

### **3.3.1. Characteristics of Social Media**

A key characteristic of social media is its inherent interactivity, facilitating greater reach and the potential for engagement (Hanna et al., 2011). This allows it to be used for multiple purposes, such as that of receiving feedback from consumers, and being able to communicate instantly (Zhang and Lin, 2015). It also allows for the development of a message that can be communicated to a mass audience simultaneously. As social media is a platform where multimedia is used, there are multiple forms of content that can be created to convey the desired message, including video, picture and text (Kim et al., 2015). Users of social media may also generate their own forms of content that can be utilised by organisations. This is a potential benefit where companies can convey the passion their consumers have for the brand (du Plessis, 2017). Social media facilitates communication between its users; therefore, organisations using it as a marketing communications channel will experience consumers discussing their products within their existing social groups. This shows that social media can operate as an electronic word-of-mouth channel (Kim and Lee, 2017). This highlights the necessity for it to be managed effectively by organisations that use it. With the widespread coverage of internet and publically accessible Wi-Fi, there are increased levels of accessibility to social media channels from a consumer's perspective. Therefore, it may be used as a tool in the sports industry to add value to an event or match day experience if used effectively (Pritchard and Stinson, 2013).

As social media facilitates the ability for sports organisations and fans to engage, it is important to identify key values and motives that lead to engagement. Abeza et al. (2013) suggest that sports organisations feel key fan value on social media comes from an understanding of the club, ongoing communication, interaction and engagement and timely responses. Furthermore, Stavros et al. (2014) identify that fans wish to express passion, hope, esteem and camaraderie through social media application. These can be related to self-identification with the team, and also facilitate social



values through interactions between fans that occur online. Filo et al. (2015) have identified that interactivity, information gathering, entertainment, fandom and camaraderie have an impact on social media use among sports fans. These values in social media are important to consider for clubs in order to facilitate engagement with their supporters.

### **3.3.2. Benefits of Social Media**

One of the reasons why social media is popular as a marketing communications tool is the perceived low-cost of adopting it. Use of social media in terms of initial capital investment is insignificant – one of the primary motivators in small businesses and small sports organisation due to budgetary restraints (Schultz et al., 2012). It also allows the creation and communication of marketing messages and value propositions quickly. Many organisations may also feel that it provides an opportunity to communicate with a larger audience than traditional marcomms channels, while still engaging with consumers or fans (Zhang and Lin, 2015). Because of its characteristics, social media allows organisations to receive feedback on their products or services. This plays a key role in improving consumer experience through adding more value, and it provides a great opportunity for sports organisations to develop their value proposition (Hewett et al., 2016). While there is a perceived low cost of social media application, it has been noted in SME research that there are important factors to consider. Durkin et al., (2013) identify that while potential business growth opportunities are cited as a common reason for social media adoption in SMEs in Ireland, the implementation of such technology requires considering how value can be meaningfully provided to consumers through the channels. In SMEs and SSCs this is a key issue, as time to conduct such research is limited. This research will identify value for both SSC and its fans (RO1); with the development of a strategic framework that can aid in facilitating value co-creation efficiently within clubs (RO2 and RO3).

### **3.3.3. Challenges When Using Social Media**

As social media has been a recent development in terms of marketing communications channels, there have also been many challenges arising when attempting to use it effectively. An organisation requires expertise in marketing to utilise the channel strategically. In order for a social media marketing strategy to be effective, they need

to acknowledge and adapt existing marketing communications practices to social media channels; SSCs need to match an effective message with the appropriate audience (Kilgour et al., 2015). For this to be achieved, SSCs need to identify important factors regarding their social media application such as the values most desired by their fans and followers.

Additionally, there may also be technological challenges that are associated with social media due to it being a digital platform. This creates issues in small organisations such as SSCs that rely on volunteers who may not have relevant experience (Michaelidou et al., 2011). Inefficient use of social media as a marketing communications channel may also have a detrimental effect on a sports club due to the misapplication of valuable resources such as time; time being an important factor in an organisation run by volunteers (Stockdale and Williams, 2007; Nichols and James, 2008). The key issue is that time may have been more effectively spent on alternative activities that could result in greater value for the organisation. Therefore, in order to maximise the potential value that the SSC can receive from social media, a strategic approach to its usage needs to be developed (Dolan et al., 2016). This study aims to develop a strategic framework for social media application in SSCs that facilitates value co-creation between the club and its fans. Therefore a strategic approach to social media use within SSCs will be possible at a practical level.

Sports organisations also recognise that social media allows them to engage with their fans on a more personal level (Wulf et al., 2017). If social media is utilised effectively in this manner, it can improve a fan's loyalty to the organisation as it helps build and develop a relationship between consumer and organisation (Wulf et al., 2017). Sports organisations have also identified that social media is being used by fans to interact with other fans regarding match day events, post-game analysis and other sport-related content (Stavros et al., 2014). There may be an opportunity for sports organisations to tap into this fan to fan interaction and generate additional value by receiving and applying feedback, or create content that can be shared between fans, such as interviews with players, or video match highlights (Wulf et al., 2017).

### **3.3.4. Social Media Marketing Best Practice**

To date, there is no known academic research into social media best practice in SSCs. These clubs do not have the resources that elite-level sporting clubs have to apply to

a marketing effort via social media platforms (Gallagher et al., 2012). Therefore, SSCs may benefit from utilising a co-creative approach to social media application. A co-creative approach in social media marketing is desirable because it will be able to generate non-transactional responses among fans who engage with content, such as brand awareness (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Previous studies have shown that fans who are already consumers of the club will be more likely to attend matches or purchase merchandise if they engage with social media content, thus showing that mutual value through co-creation is an effective method of utilising social media (Xie and Lee, 2015; Blasco-Arcas et al., 2016; Yuksel et al., 2016).

### **3.4. Fan Loyalty in Sport**

A large body of research has been conducted into brand/club loyalty within sport, which highlights that consumers, or fans, become passionate about a club or organisation (Funk and James, 2006). This passion then has a subsequent impact on their behaviour. Fan loyalty typologies have been developed with regards to sports, and Fullerton (2006) suggests that while many sports fans share similar characteristics, it could be more beneficial for marketers to develop fan typologies and segmentation strategies across different sports. Existing fan typologies focus on a multitude of characteristics of loyalty, from regularity of match attendance, to motivations for attendance among others (Hunt et al., 1999; Quick, 2000; Stewart et al., 2003; Fillis and Mackay, 2014).

#### **3.4.1. Types of Loyalty**

There are three forms in which customer loyalty is manifested: *cognitive, affective, and behavioural* (Oliver, 1999). *Cognitive loyalty* develops through continued association with a sports organisation, and results in loyalty having an impact on an individual's decision-making (Lee et al., 2010). This may be through choosing to attend a match over an alternative source of entertainment on a given day, or by impacting on their disassociation with an alternative team or brand (Kwon et al., 2005; Lee and Trail, 2011). Cognitive loyalty is primarily a consequence of ongoing interaction or consumption of a particular brand, and can itself have an impact on how behavioural loyalty is exhibited (James, 2001).

*Behavioural loyalty* is manifested by how loyalty impacts upon an individual's behaviour. For example, loyalty to a particular brand will increase the likelihood of that brand being chosen for purchase over another by the consumer (Lee and Trail, 2011). Within sports increased levels of behavioural loyalty could be shown through increased match attendance, through greater purchases of merchandise, or through engaging/interacting with the social media accounts of the club (Kwon et al., 2005; Tsiotsou, 2013).

*Affective loyalty* describes the emotional attachment that develops to a brand or organisation through the continued positive association with it. Within this research affective and emotional loyalty will be used interchangeably. This is particularly important in the context of sport, as the emotional attachment shown to brands is often higher than that in other markets (Heere and Dickson, 2008). This high-level of affective loyalty has a consequential impact on behavioural loyalty, as fan behaviour is exhibited differently than that of brand loyalty in other contexts (Kwon et al., 2005; Tsiotsou, 2013). This characteristic of sport is often noted in many fan typologies, where it is highlighted that there can be dysfunctional fans, whose affective loyalty may have a negative effect on the sports organisation due to their behaviour being inappropriate or anti-social (Hunt et al., 1999).

It is important for this research study to understand how varying levels of loyalty will impact on social media use in the clubs. Through engaging with fans, behavioural loyalty is exhibited that facilitates mutual value, as content reaches wider audiences (Gorgani, 2016). Individuals showing high levels of affective loyalty may be more likely to engage with social media content (Stander and de Beer, 2016; Lee and Lee, 2017). Thus, it becomes necessary to segment fans based on their existing levels of loyalty to derive from findings of the study whether there is a greater likelihood of engagement from fans of higher loyalty. At a practical level this would lead to the development of strategies targeted at highly loyal fans to focus resources and utilise them more efficiently to generate greater returns.

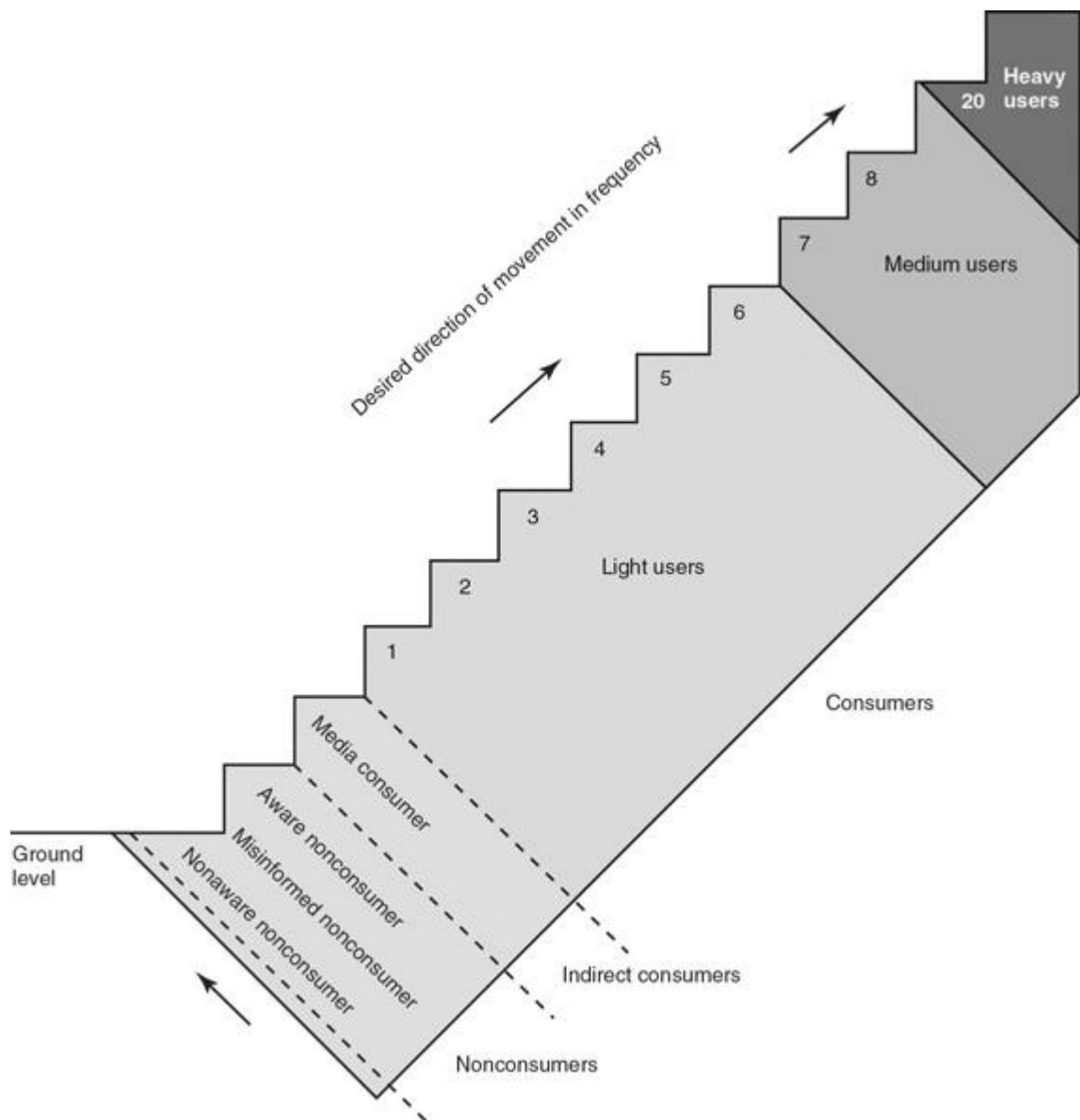
### **3.4.2. Consequences of Loyalty**

For a sports organisation, increasing loyalty leads to increased consumption of the team or brand. This is shown through increased merchandise sales, increased match day attendance, and ultimately results in the increase of revenue for the club (Kwon

and Kwak, 2014). This extra revenue can be used to develop club facilities, or improve their on-the-pitch talent and performance to increase their chances of competing at higher levels of sport. Therefore, it is vitally important that clubs aim to increase the loyalty of their fans in order to generate this additional revenue. Behavioural loyalty comes as a by-product of increasing affective loyalty to the club (Tsiotsou, 2013). Within sport, affective loyalty is high between consumer/fan and brand. Therefore, it may be possible to utilise this loyalty as a resource in order to generate improved levels of behavioural loyalty among fans. Finding ways in which to do this via social media is important within clubs, as it may be an effective way of tapping into existing resources that have been underutilised. There may also be ways to utilise social media in order to do this; however, there is no known research into how this could be possible. In other words, social media should be used to generate value for the club and for fans to create mutual value in a cost-effective manner (Dean and Alhothali, 2017; Wulf et al., 2017).

### **3.4.3. Loyalty Escalator Model**

Loyalty in sport has been depicted by Mullin et al. (2014) in a loyalty escalator below (figure 3.2). This diagram shows that as loyalty increases, fans move along a scale, whereby they increase their rate of consumption. As fans move up the ladder, their loyalty (cognitive, affective, and behavioural) has increased. Therefore, it should be the primary objective of the sports organisation to attempt to move their fans up this ladder in order to increase their rates of consumption (where consumption is merchandise, spending at alternative revenue streams, and attendance at matches). This is a key objective in smaller sports organisations that rely heavily on the increased consumption of their existing fans who develop relationships leading to repeat purchase intentions (Kwon and Kwak, 2014). SSCs utilise social media to generate awareness and attraction in consumers exhibiting lower levels of loyalty to increase consumption rates. In regards to the SSC, several of these segments play a key role: *non-aware non-consumers, misinformed non-consumers, and aware non-consumer.*



**Figure 3.2 – Loyalty Ladder in Sport (Mullin et al., 2014).**

*Non-aware consumers* are those who are completely unaware of the availability of a local SSC that is within reasonable distance for attendance. They are seen as potential consumers; however, ineffective marketing has caused an issue in generating no awareness within this segment (Mullin et al., 2014). Due to generally small attendance sizes in sport, it is likely that this is large consumer segment compared in relation to the others.

*Misinformed non-consumers* are those which are aware that a SSC exists and are within its catchment area. This segment is necessary as there may be individuals who know of the SSC, but do not have an accurate idea of what it is or its value proposition.

This is pertinent in semi-professional sport, as with amateur sport due to generalisations among non-followers of the sport being poor quality due to the lack of paid professionals in it. A source of misinformation is the lack of effective marketing communications, as poor brand management causes issues in brand perception and reduced brand value (Mullin et al., 2014).

*Aware non-consumers* are those who are both aware of a SSC's existence and its value proposition. They live within the catchment area of a SSC. However, they are at a stage of the loyalty ladder where awareness has not turned to attraction in regards to the development of a desire to attend a match or purchase merchandise. This segment may also contain consumers who are aware of the club but will never develop a desire to attend a match or purchase merchandise due to personal preferences. This will also be a large-sized segment. However, due to the existence of awareness as a factor of the first stage of developing allegiance to a sports organisation, individuals within this segment may be targetable with marketing communications. They will have received correct information through a channel at some point to generate awareness. While the marketing effort may have been successful at generating awareness, generation of attraction to the club will have been unsuccessful.

#### **3.4.4. Existing Consumer Loyalty Segments within Sport**

Additionally, this research focuses on existing loyal consumers. Fillis and Mackay (2014) identify four key types of sports consumer in their research into Hibernian Football Club and social integration: casual followers, social devotees, fans, and committed supporters. These segments are important to this research as they will become part of the conceptual model, depicting club value through the movement of sports fans increasing in loyalty to the club.

The segment showing the lowest level of loyalty to the club are Casual Followers. Fillis and MacKay (2014) define a Casual Follower within their supporter matrix as "those who do not attend regularly, and choose instead to keep abreast of results and information from a distance." For the purpose of this research, these are also fans who attend on an inconsistent basis and may be influenced to attend more due to have developed an awareness for attendance and previous experiences with the club. In addition to this, their reasons for non-attendance may be overcome by more effective marketing, providing value that was not experienced through previous interactions

with the club online or when attending matches. Gallagher et al. (2016) identify a similar fan segment as 'The temporary supporter', one who can often become less loyal to the team over time. While Fillis and MacKay (2014) identify that Casual Followers only develop loose connections with other fans, this research does not consider this as an important point, as virtual connections can be made on social media that replace connections made at matches. Therefore, this characteristic will not be considered a factor during empirical research.

The second least loyal segment are Social Devotees. Social Devotees are described by Fillis and MacKay (2014) as those who "place significant importance upon the social experience through which they can channel their support for the team." Further to this description, and for the purpose of this research, these are a category of fans who attend matches on a more regular basis than Casual Followers, and can therefore be seen as the next stage on the loyalty ladder. While Casual Followers may also place significant importance on the social aspect when they attend, it is more prevalent among Social Devotees. Due to the measurement of attendance and behavioural loyalty in this research when segmenting fans into categories, both Social Devotees and Casual Followers can be compared to the "Committed Casual" in Tapp (2004). This is because they may have a high attitudinal loyalty to the club, but do not attend matches consistently. Gallagher et al. (2016) identify the existence of the Social Devotee in sport in Ireland, providing evidence of its applicability as a consumer category to this study. Outside of attendance defining the characteristic of these fans, an additional attribute is their focus on entertainment as a motive for attendance (Gallagher et al., 2016). This category of fans are also more likely to follow the SSC on social media and consumer information external to match attendance more regularly than the previous segment (Fillis and Mackay, 2014).

The second most loyal segment of consumers are Fans. Fans of the club are those who have developed a significant level of attachment to the team and the team's success may have an impact on their emotions (Fillis and Mackay, 2014). Often these Fans have developed their loyalty over time, beginning as Casual Followers or Social Devotees. Therefore, they share characteristics with the "Devoted" fan discussed by Hunt et al. (1999). It is indicated that they attend matches on a more regular basis. This behavioural trait of fans is caused by their attachment to the club, as they become increasingly loyal, and develop an allegiance (Funk and James, 2006). These Fans are



important in the conceptual model, as their loyalty to the club may make them interact or engage with social media on a more frequent basis than other segments lower on the ladder. Fans therefore may act as brand ambassadors, along with the most loyal segment: the Committed Supporter.

The segment exhibiting the highest level of loyalty to the club are Committed Supporters. Committed Supporters are described by Fillis and MacKay (2014) as being different from Fans due to their long-term approach to actions regarding the club, and also take actions with the club's "best interest at heart". These can be akin to the "Fanatical" fan discussed by Hunt et al. (1999) or "Fanatics" in Tapp (2004). Committed supporters have over a long period of time developed into highly regular attendees at matches, and as such show complete allegiance to the team, with their support not dwindling through poor performance (Funk and James, 2006). The model highlights that these are the most loyal consumers, and as such may actively seek out information on social media to engage with on a frequent basis. In terms of consumption levels, they will most likely be season ticket holders who prioritise attendance of matches over other interests and hobbies, only failing to attend if they absolutely cannot make it.

### **3.4.5. Loyalty and Social Media**

Fan loyalty may not only be developed via social media, but is also exhibited through fan use of social media. Research shows that fans express their loyalty to a club through interactions with fans of the same team, and with those of rival sporting organisations (Uhrich, 2014; Horbel et al., 2016; Popp and Woratschek, 2016). This is important, as these behaviours on social media show the levels of loyalty certain fans have to an organisation (Popp and Woratschek, 2016). It is also necessary to understand that the club can have an influence on the discussion fans have with other fans (both of the same and rival teams) through its use of social media. For example, if a team wins a match, they may use social media to post the score, and it may contain some form of celebratory message. Fans will use this to communicate with rival fans in order to compete with them on a psychological level (Stavros et al., 2014). These behaviours are important because they may also lead to issues through antisocial behaviour, or dysfunctional behaviour among some fans (Hunt et al., 1999). Therefore, an effective approach to managing social media in SSCs should also seek to

understand when and how these instances occur in order to avoid them. Fan misuse of social media can be damaging to the club's brand image, and may also deter other potential fans from attending matches as they do not want to be associated with, or exposed to such behaviour (Stieler et al., 2014).

While there are negatives associated with fan loyalty on social media, there are also many positive opportunities. As fans share club-created content on social media (due to their loyalty, and self-identification with the club), this allows clubs to send some form of message to social groups that they may not have been exposed to before (Gorgani, 2016); this may create an opportunity to enter new markets. In most cases, a fan of a club that is using social media to share content regarding the club, will have their own social network that these shared messages will reach, outside of the club's usual audience. This fan's social group is an untapped resource of potential revenue for a sports organisation, as the club may be able to convey a message via this fan to the social group in order to encourage or convince them to attend a match (Gorgani, 2016). Fisher (2015) acknowledges that this form of value can be recognised by organisations through engaged content on social media. Furthermore, this value is increased if the individual has greater influence over opinions, or can act as a brand ambassador. The value for the organisation or club may also be increased if that individual has high quality or volume networks. Research shows that individuals who attend match day events are much more likely to re-attend the same venue in the future (Pons et al., 2006; G. Gray and Wert-Gray, 2012). Therefore, the club must create a message that may convince sports consumers who have not previously attended a match before to try it, while simultaneously motivating its fans to share this message so that it reaches the intended audience.

At a practical level, little is known about effective social media usage in the context of semi-professional sport in which SSCs exist. While in theory, tapping into a social network from an existing fan may be a seemingly efficient way of using social media, in reality the factors to make this possible and effective at increasing attendance need to be addressed (Dolan et al., 2016). This includes the creation of a marketing message that clearly communicates the value proposition of match attendance to new consumers, and motivating the existing fans to share this message with their social groups (Kilgour et al., 2015).

If a sports fan does bring members of their social group to a match day event, this can create mutual value for the fan and club. Firstly, it will add to the social value experienced by the fan; secondly, it may add to the overall atmosphere of the stadium; thirdly, the club will receive additional revenue through ticket sales from the new consumer (Moreno et al., 2015). When viewed from this perspective, it can be seen that value is co-created for club, fan and potentially the new consumer who may have a positive experience and ultimately begin to develop an association and loyalty to the club. In this manner, social media has been used to get consumers onto the first step of the loyalty ladder, and consequently can be more easily targeted by future messages and future engagement at matches and via social media in order to help develop this loyalty to the club (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2016).

This research will not be focusing on the specific message that needs generated to motivate existing fans to share, or to motivate new segments to attend. Instead, it focuses on identifying whether a co-creative approach to social media is the most effective approach to marketing communication in SSCs, and the key factors in this process. The club will also experience increased revenues from more efficient use of social media as a marketing communications tool (Xie and Lee, 2015; Blasco-Arcas et al., 2016; Yuksel et al., 2016). In order to further the rationale for why social media may be used effectively in this way, it will be important to identify what value is, why it acts as a motivating factor in purchase decisions or intentions, to identify how value can be created, or co-created, and how this occurs in both the context of sports and on social media (Zhu and Chen, 2015; Horbel et al., 2016).

### **3.5. Value Co-creation**

Value co-creation literature has evolved from service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo, 2009). This study focuses on how engagement and interaction leads to mutual value being experienced by all parties involved in the exchange. The literature reviewed will identify what value is, what value co-creation is, and how value co-creation is experienced on social media based on existing research. The focus of this research is on how social media can be utilised most effectively to co-create value in semi-professional sport between a club and its fans, as there is no known research investigating this area.

### **3.5.1. Defining Value**

Value is idiosyncratic in nature and experientially perceived. It relates to positive associations with a product, brand, service, or experience (Zeithaml, 1988). While academic research often links perceived value with price and/or quality, the purpose of value in this study is related to perceptions of interactions between SSCs and their fans, from multiple perspectives (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Every individual experiences and defines value differently depending on their personal evaluation of an experience (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). As a whole, value can be seen as a positive improvement on a person's current state. It is seen as a positive perception of an experience, good or service; therefore, provision of value in business leads to competitive advantage (Christensen, 2010). Experiencing value leads to repeat purchase intentions in this manner, so providing greater levels of value to consumers will result in a competitive advantage (Christensen, 2010). As value is perceived individually, and uniquely by each consumer, it is important to note that not all consumers will have the same experience from the same good or service.

Value propositions are offered to consumers as a way of suggesting that the opportunity to experience value may be seen through a particular good or service. Through a service dominant logic perspective, it is posited that organisations cannot create value, they can only create the opportunity for value to be experienced by a consumer, and then they must communicate this potential through a value proposition (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Frow and Payne, 2011; Frow et al., 2014). It is then up to the consumer to engage with the proposition and the organisation in order for the potential value to be experienced. This has implications for organisations regarding marketing communications and managerial decision making. The organisation must be able to effectively communicate the value proposition and its potential benefits to the target consumer; this requires a knowledge and understanding of the consumer, what channels are most effective at reaching this segment and what message to provide (Zhu and Chen, 2015; Horbel et al., 2016). In SSCs this may be an issue as the clubs do not have the available resources to conduct effective market research that could identify these metrics. However, social media channels are already widely used in sports organisations, many fans already follow the clubs on these platforms. Therefore, a potentially cost-effective marketing communications channel is already available to

reach the target audience. The clubs must identify what message to create that can achieve value (Kilgour et al., 2015).

Fans of SSCs can be utilised as brand ambassadors on social media to reach new segments of consumers. This may result in avoidance of issues arising in terms of cost requirements to research and communicate with new potential markets for an organisation (Fisher, 2015). The current fans of a sports club at the semi-professional level can be used as a conduit by which value propositions are offered to potential consumers in order to increase attendance at matches and generate the additional revenue and resources necessary to develop the club (Gorgani, 2016). The first stage of this process is to identify the values that lead to fan engagement on social media that will drive the distribution of club content through social networks.

#### **3.5.1.1. Value in Sport**

Sport is a unique context, and as such, value may be experienced in different ways from other markets. There are multiple ways in which consumers will experience this value (Horbel et al., 2016). One way is through self-identification with a sports brand or organisation. Self-identification occurs when an organisation is used by a fan to express part of their personality (Kwon et al., 2008). It occurs in many contexts outside of sport, and is one of the primary consequences of brand loyalty. Self-identity is expressed in sport through basking in reflected glory (BIRGing) and cutting-off reflected failures (CORFing). BIRGing occurs when a sports team is doing well, and their fans feel a sense of success through being a supporter and as such associated with the team. CORFing occurs when a team is under achieving, or not performing at a high enough standard, and fans attempt to distance themselves from the club and brand (Kwon et al., 2008). This may have an impact on fan emotions, particularly of those who show a high level of affective loyalty to the club.

Both of these behaviours have an impact in sharing and competing which occurs between groups of sports fans. Consumer loyalty in sports is often expressed through social interactions (Stander and de Beer, 2016; Wulf et al., 2017). Therefore, it can be said that sports fans can experience value through these social interactions, and the club becomes a part of how this is achieved. This value relies on fans being part of existing social groups or social networks. Often these social groups are manifested on social media as brand communities (Popp and Woratschek, 2016). This allows fans of

the same team to share knowledge and information regarding their supported club with one another, leading to greater levels of experienced value, and making fans associate to a greater level with the club. Similarly, fans may compete with rival fans through match results, transfer news or speculation, and BIRGing/CORFing. This means that fans of a particular club can experience value through social interactions with rival fans, and as such these opposition fans should be considered an important part of the value proposition (Witkemper et al., 2012; Stavros et al., 2014). They may also have a subsequent impact on how marketing communications should be conducted in a club. There are multiple other ways in which value can be experienced, such as through the entertainment sport can provide, passing-time and socialising at match events through conversations not related to the sport.

### **3.5.2. Overview of Value Co-creation**

A service-dominant view of marketing suggests that value can be co-created between a service provider and consumer through interaction and communication (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Payne et al., 2008; Vargo, 2008; Vargo et al., 2008; Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Vargo, 2009; Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Grönroos, 2012; Gummerus, 2013). Value is co-created in an ecosystem where multiple actors interact within value networks to integrate their resources with other actors (Woratschek et al., 2014). This concept translates into sport, where value is co-created between the clubs, their fans, local businesses, the league or governing body and multiple others (Durchholz and Woratschek, 2011; Hajli and Hajli, 2013; Castro-Martinez and Jackson, 2015).

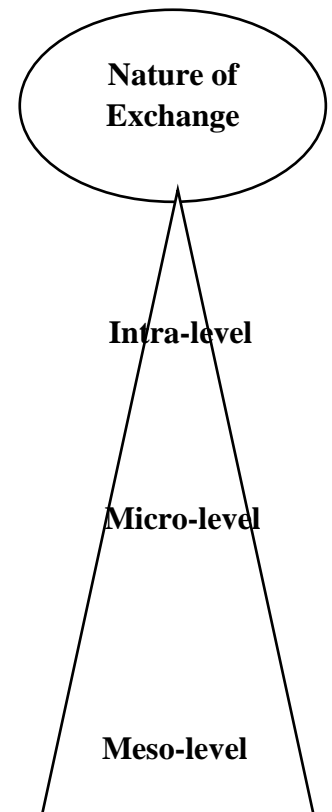
Likewise, it is also possible for value to be co-destroyed. This is highlighted by Payne et al. (2008) and Plé and Cáceres (2010), who argue that the accidental or purposeful misuse of resources from one or more actors involved in the interaction can destroy value for multiple actors. This means that there is potential for the club to destroy or diminish value for itself and its fans through wasting valuable resources, or through providing fans with an experience that does not result in value for them. Similarly, fans can destroy value for a club by spending their money elsewhere, engaging in antisocial behaviour that destroys the match day experience for other fans, or potentially damaging the brand image of the club itself (Stieler et al., 2014).

Value for clubs can be seen as meeting organisational goals. For clubs of this size, survival is a key concern followed by the need to develop (Gammelsæter, 2010). Therefore, the key organisational goal is to increase revenue, which can be achieved in multiple ways. The club may wish to increase its revenue through improving levels of loyalty from its fans, leading to increased levels of consumption. It may also wish to raise brand awareness to encourage sponsorship deals, or to encourage new fans to attend matches. Improving levels of fan loyalty can be achieved through providing information to fans, and through providing them with other forms of value. Value for fans can be seen as something which provides them with a benefit (Thompson et al., 2014; Stavros et al., 2014). Literature highlights that the most common themes of value experienced in sport fandom and consumption are self-identity, BIRGing/CORFing, socialising, competing, knowledge, entertainment, pass-time, involvement and sharing (Witkemper et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2014; Stavros et al., 2014; Uhrich, 2014). If the potential for these values to be experienced can be provided by a club, there is potential to improve levels of fan loyalty, and increase consumption resulting in more revenue.

### **3.5.3. Value Co-creation in Sport**

Woratscheck et al. (2014) has contextualised the foundational premises (FPs) of service-dominant logic into sport (figure 3.3). This research will cover several aspects of these premises (between foundational premise one and foundational premise seven) that relate to value co-creation at the intra-level (motivations of exchange at a single actor's level), and at the micro-level (dyadic and triadic relationships and their nature). While research concerning the entire ecosystem of exchange is important, it is necessary to research exchange at a smaller level to develop an understanding of its process (Grönroos and Voima, 2013; Uhrich, 2014).

<b>FP1</b>	Sporting activities are the core of sport management.
<b>FP2</b>	Service is the fundamental basis of exchange in sport.
<b>FP3</b>	Sport goods are vehicles for service provision.
<b>FP4</b>	Firms and customers can only offer value propositions.
<b>FP5</b>	Sport firms create value propositions in the configuration of a value network.
<b>FP6</b>	Sport consumers co-create value by integrating resources from their social groups.
<b>FP7</b>	Value is always co-created by firms, customers, and other stakeholders.
<b>FP8</b>	Co-created value is always value-in-use.
<b>FP9</b>	Co-created value is always value-in-context.
<b>FP10</b>	The role of firms, customers and stakeholders is to integrate resources of their networks to co-create value.



**Fig. 3.3 – Sports Value Framework (Woratschek et al., 2014).**

The first three foundational premises are the underlying ‘basic assumptions’ regarding the service value framework and are used to identify the nature of exchange in the market. They aim to look at the intra-level of value co-creation, which focuses within the organisation (Woratschek et al., 2014).

Social media needs to be considered as the platform whereby fans and teams offer their value propositions. In other words, social media is where clubs and fans interact, facilitating the potential integration of their resources that leads to value co-creation (Uhrich, 2014; Woratschek et al., 2014). Therefore, much like the match day experience being a platform for potential co-creation, social media channels where socialising, interacting and fan expression are also relevant and thus require research from a managerial perspective so that the process can be made more efficient through effective management (Varadarajan, 2010; Waters et al., 2011).

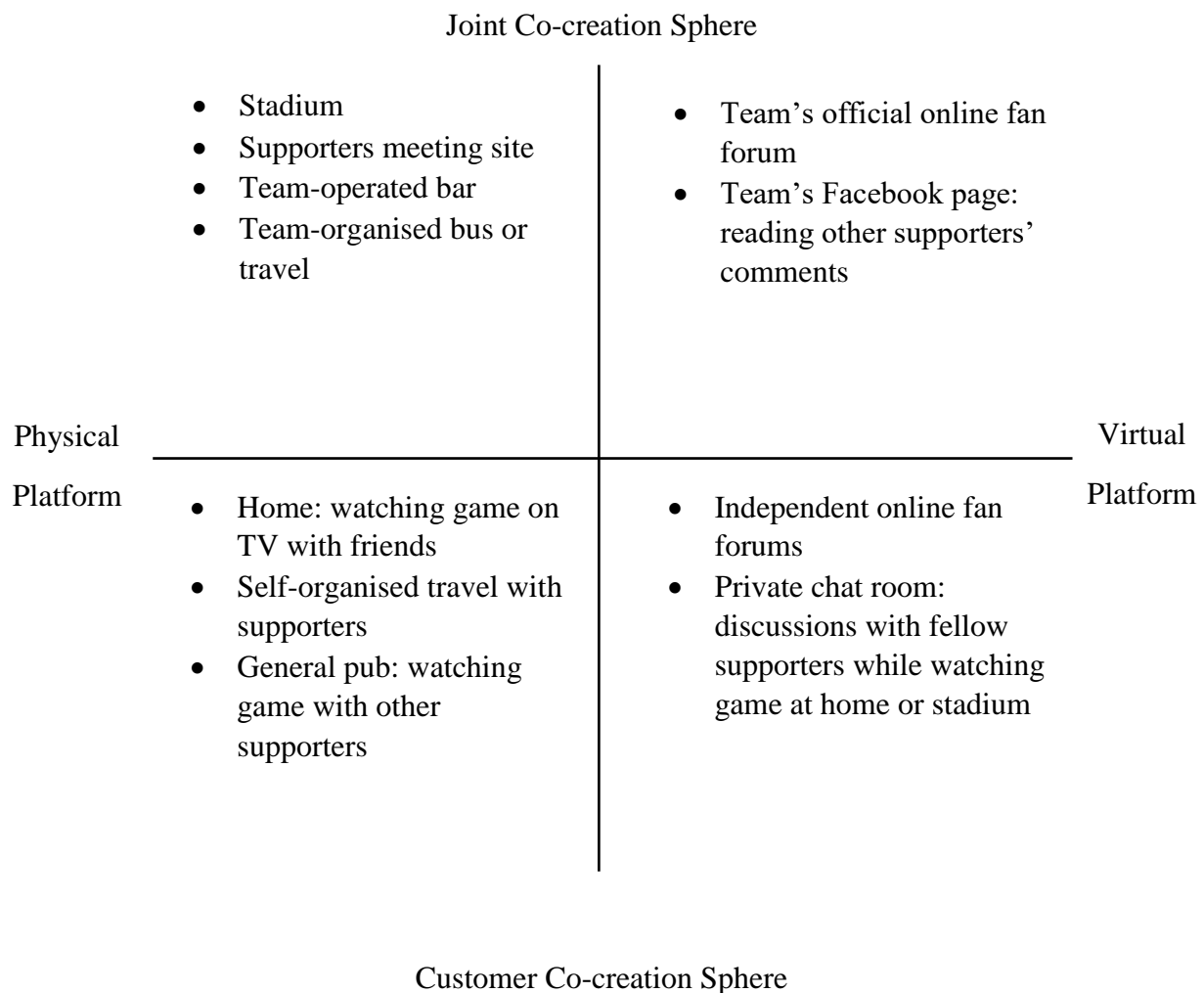
This research focuses on the relationship between fan and club, while acknowledging the influences caused by other actors in the network, and their impact on developing a realistic approach to strategic social media usage in SSCs. In other words, taking into consideration the lack of resources at this level, all actors in the network may not



be effectively managed by the club; therefore, those with greatest potential impact on organisational goals should be considered primary targets of value co-creation strategies (Durchholz and Woratschek, 2011; Rosca, 2013; Woratschek et al., 2014; Uhrich, 2014; Lorgnier and Su, 2014).

The context of this research is important as club size has a direct impact on the availability of resources and limited resources mean that a more efficient approach to managing the most important actors within the value co-creation process is necessary (Varadarajan, 2010; Saarijärvi et al., 2013; Shank and Lyberger, 2014; Rathore et al., 2016a). To prioritise the facilitation value co-creation with these actors first would suggest an efficient approach; therefore, larger clubs at the elite level of sport could benefit more from research covering the entire ecosystem of co-creation and exchange than SSCs (Woratschek et al., 2014).

Foundational premise six, “sport consumers co-create value primarily by integrating resources from their social groups” highlights this (Woratschek et al., 2014). The interaction of fans within different social groups can also lead to value (Durchholz and Woratschek, 2011; Rosca, 2013; Uhrich, 2014). Therefore, the club can create an environment where this occurs on social media (in a manageable way) in order to have an influence in the process. For example, getting more fans from the same social group to attend a match will improve the experience for all those within that group; the club can achieve this through using social media as an effective marketing communications channel (Abeza et al., 2013; Carlson and O’Cass, 2012; Dixon et al., 2015).



**Figure 3.4 - Typology of Customer-to-Customer Value Co-creation Platforms in Team Sports (Uhrich, 2014).**

Value co-creation can occur on different platforms. Uhrich (2014) presents a typology (Fig. 3.4) of the platforms where value co-creation may occur in sport. This highlights that there can be co-creation in both physical and virtual settings. The model also shows that there is a joint sphere, where club and customers directly interact, and a customer sphere, where co-creation takes place between customers with no direct involvement from the club. It can be argued that a strategic approach to social media management from the club will have a positive impact in the joint virtual sphere – where the club communicates with its consumers via social media. Due to the inherent interactivity of social media, these platforms provide an interface where value can be co-created (Williams and Chinn, 2010; O'Shea and Alonso, 2012). Therefore, it is important that clubs understand how these channels should be utilised to facilitate the

co-creation of value with their fans in order to develop these relationships (Eagleman, 2013; Uhrich, 2014).

This provides a key opportunity to SSCs. Through the engagement of fans with social media content, value may be created without a large application of resources from the club. As value is created mutually through engagement with content, it highlights that focusing on value co-creation in clubs with limited resources would make most efficient use of the time and capital that are available. This study aims to develop a strategic framework whereby social media can be used to co-create value between a club and its fans. A necessary step in this is identifying how the process of value co-creation occurs on social media, which requires the identification of value from the perspective of both a club and its fans.

Sports clubs must identify how value co-creation can lead to the generation of value. Uhrich (2014) also highlights in his research that if a club can extend its influence beyond the traditional boundary of communication, there may be potential to create additional value (Grönroos and Voima, 2013). Therefore, if the club can find a way to extend its communication with fans into what is currently considered the customer sphere, there is potential for the club to co-create more value. However, there is no known research into how this can be achieved at a practical level (Uhrich, 2014).

This relates to foundational premise six from the sports value framework. Woratscheck et al. (2014) state that value is co-created among social groups of fans. If the club can facilitate, or impact on the discussion that groups of fans are having with other groups; there may be potential to co-create increased value in an efficient manner. Research must firstly identify how clubs can co-create with fans more effectively, and secondly investigate how the club can influence value co-creation within the customer sphere at a realistic, and practical level. Uhrich (2014) calls for research into how firms can develop strategies for managing customer-to-customer value co-creation. This is related to triadic relationships, and exchange as a network rather than on a one-to-one basis. It is important to evaluate how this process occurs on social media, as this is a channel allowing the extension of communication; therefore, a better understanding can lead to a strategic approach being undertaken (Ramaswamy, 2008; Uhrich, 2014). The lack of understanding of social media may lead to potential value co-destruction through misuse of club resources (Plé and Cáceres, 2010; Stieler et al., 2014).

### **3.6. Development of a Conceptual Model for Social Media Value Co-creation in Semi-professional Sport**

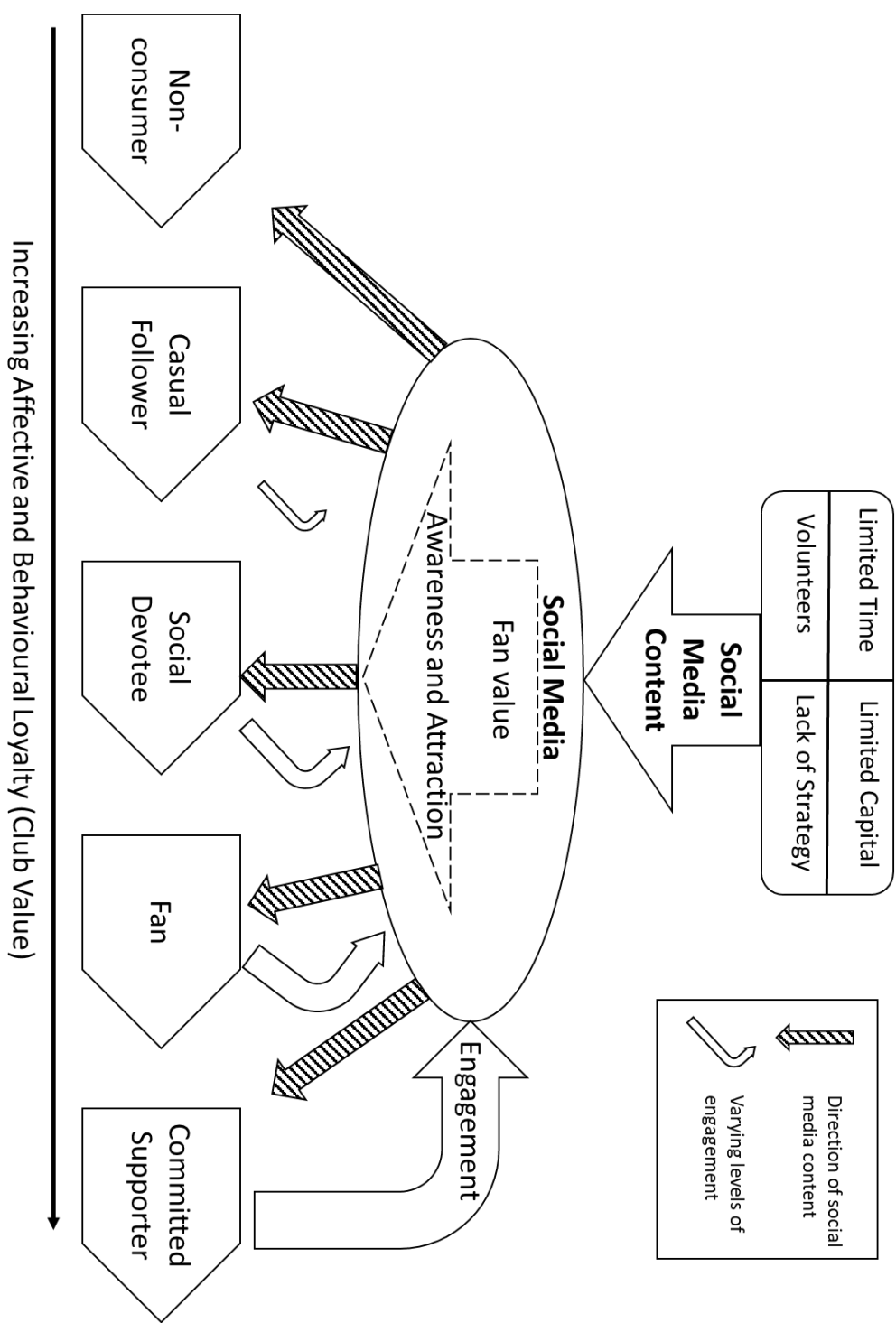
A conceptual model has been developed for this study which is shown in Fig 3.5. This has been derived from the literature discussed in this chapter to explain the relationship between SSCs, value co-creation and social media application as a marketing communications channel. It highlights the three research objectives that will be used to achieve the research aim of developing a framework for effective social media application in semi-professional sports. The use of existing fan categories on a loyalty ladder is considered alongside the platform of social media where value co-creation will occur. Following this, the social media application process, where co-creation between club and fans will occur is evaluated.

The conceptual model illustrates the context and characteristics of SSCs and how fans interact with the club. The characteristics of the SSC will have a direct impact on the content that is created for social media platforms and channels utilised by the club. That is the limited time, capital, lack of strategy and reliance on volunteers restricts the club's use of social media. Awareness and attraction to the club and related events may occur among individuals who receive the content on their personal social media channels from the club, if value is experienced. If the content provides value to them, they may become aware of an offering by the club, and consequently be attracted to attend a match. These are the first two stages of developing attachment and allegiance to a sports club according to Funk and James (2006).

Non-consumers and current consumers of the club may move along the loyalty ladder if they experience value through the club's social media channels. Non-consumers include non-aware consumers, misinformed non-consumers, and aware non-consumers. This will occur as fans become aware of content; the content that drives attraction to the club's value proposition, or that may lead to consumer engagement with the social media content. Consequentially, an increase in consumer loyalty will lead to value being experienced by the club through their application of social media. By developing the affective loyalty of consumers, and their attachment to the club may lead to an impact on behavioural loyalty whereby attendance is increased, or consumers increase their likelihood of engaging with social media content. Engagement with social media content from the club is where value can be co-created.

Engagement occurs through value being experienced by club fans, motivating the engagement. As fans engage with content, it filters through existing social media networks increasing the potential audience that the message can reach. This generates more value for clubs, as they have an increased likelihood of generating awareness or attraction due to the larger audience receiving their value proposition. Engagement is more likely from higher loyal segments, highlighted by the differing sizes of arrows on the model.

**Figure 3.5 - Conceptual Model of Engagement on Social Media in SSCs.**  
**Semi-Professional Sports Club**



### **3.6.1. Fan Segments in Conceptual Model**

The conceptual model is comprised of fan segments. These segments are adapted from both Fillis and MacKay (2014) and Mullin et al. (2014), positioned along a loyalty ladder. The segments from Fillis and MacKay (2014) were selected due to the appropriateness of social integration and its relationship with development of loyalty. They were adapted to fit this research, focusing on behavioural loyalty levels. As social media is a focus of this research, virtual social integration is seen as a prevalent factor, whereby sports consumers or supporters seek social integration with others of a similar mind-set. This occurs through particular behaviours exhibited on social media, as it would at a sports event and can lead to the development of brand communities (Popp and Woratschek, 2016). The terminology for fan segments from Fillis and MacKay (2014) are used, but for the purpose of this research the requirements for being part of a particular segment vary slightly due to the context of semi-professional sport. Within this research, social integration plays less of a role in the categorisation of fans; these segments are used primarily due to the relevance of the sporting research context, and are adapted to highlight the progression of consumers along a loyalty ladder as opposed to being positioned on a matrix.

The loyalty ladder depicts these segments in a linear fashion, whereby consumers move up the ladder and as such show increased levels of behavioural and affective loyalty to the club. The club desires consumers to move in this direction, as it results in increased purchase intentions such as attendance or merchandising, and this in turn will increase revenue that can be utilised for club development. Consumers can move both ways along the ladder; however, the purpose here is to show the desired movement up, to becoming more loyal consumers through developing awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance (Funk and James, 2006).

A key characteristic of social media that is present and depicted on the conceptual model is the existence of social networks. This is important, as the content an individual engages with on social media will appear on the social media of their contacts. This enables the creation of awareness and potential attraction among non-current consumers, or segments that show less loyalty. As the model highlights, content will disseminate through these networks and penetrate other consumer segments from those who engage with it, generating potential marketing value through

social media for SSCs. Research by Gorgani (2016) has identified that an individual seeing the opinion of contacts within their social networks on a particular topic will have an influence on their opinion. Therefore, this research supports the conceptual model, in that marketing communications content that disseminates through social networks to other consumer segments from those engaging with the content may have an impact on moving people along the loyalty ladder.

The model shows that engagement is necessary for the penetration of marketing content into other segments through social networks. Social media is also highly interactive and facilitates engagement with marketing content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, the factors and process that enable engagement requires research from the perspective of both club and fans. This engagement is also linked with value co-creation, as multiple authors discuss interaction as key to mutual value being experienced (Dean and Alhothali, 2017).

At present, content is created by SSCs and is communicated via their social media channels to their followers or fans. Content requires resources such as time and marketing expertise to create effectively. This process from a club's perspective will also need evaluated as it will explain how value can be provided to their fans, and areas for improvement in regards to marketing practice within the clubs. When this content is communicated to followers, the conceptual model shows that higher loyalty supporter segments may be reached more effectively than others. This is because these are consumers who may more actively seek out information on channels such as social media, due to their high levels of attachment and allegiance to clubs (Funk and James, 2006; Fillis and Mackay, 2014).

The process of value co-creation is present on social media channels where the club provides content which gives value to fans. Fans in return engage with this, and the content will disseminate through their social networks to increase awareness and potentially attraction among non-consumers, or consumers who exist in less loyal segments. This leads to mutual value for the SSCs, as these individuals may increase their behavioural loyalty through increased purchasing, or develop attraction and interest in the club itself. In other words this identifies mutual value, and highlights the necessity for SSCs to utilise social media in a manner that is aimed at co-creating mutual value.



Through the reviewed literature, it is identified that fans in higher loyalty segments will be more likely to engage with social media content. Therefore, these segments may be better targets for content facilitating a focus on value co-creation through social media (Stander and de Beer, 2016; Lee and Lee, 2017). It is also important to note that the model does not propose that only non-consumers are a target of SSC marketing; existing fans of the club can also be moved into more loyal segments through effective marketing. This model illustrates that value co-creation is an approach that may do this, and therefore clubs require a strategic framework to use social media in a way that can achieve this.

The model highlights that value needs to be experienced by consumers before they will engage with the content. If there are particular types of value that are required for engagement, these need to be identified before a strategic approach or framework can be developed to utilising social media for value co-creation. When fans engage or share the content it will reach individuals within their existing social networks. This is a key factor in the overall process, as it will lead to potential value for the SSC. A consequence of this process (highlighted on the conceptual model) is that brand awareness of the SSCs involved in the social media content will be increased. Furthermore, if the content communicates an effective value proposition, it may also develop attraction in potential or current consumers that increase their purchase intentions. As this is a key factor in the development of attraction and potential allegiance to the club, it is necessary to identify methods for facilitating engagement with social media content (Funk and James, 2006).

### **3.7. Chapter Summary**

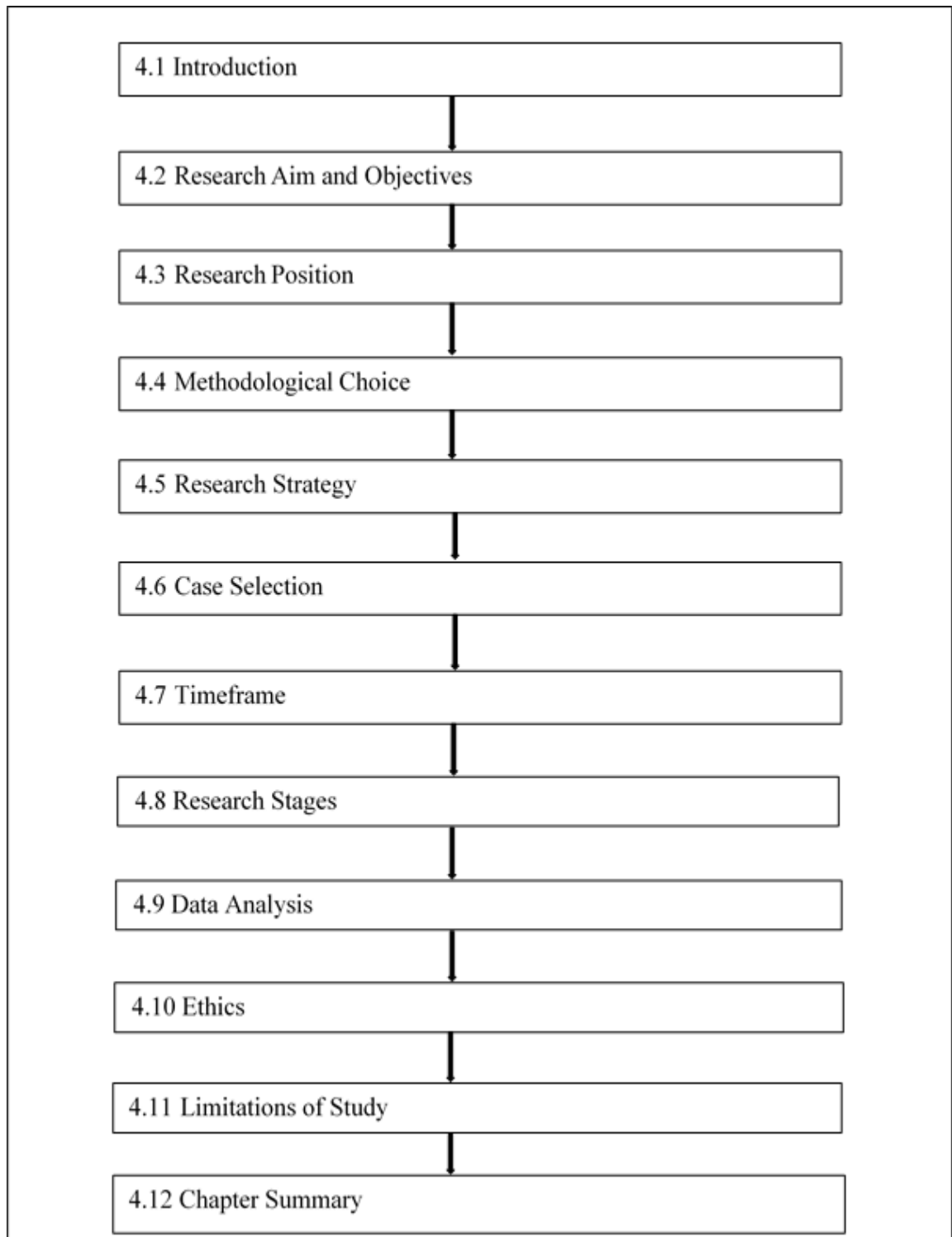
This chapter reviewed relevant literature relating to the research objectives. Firstly, an overview of marketing literature was provided and applied to SSCs. Secondly, literature regarding social media marketing was discussed, the importance of engagement highlighted, and the characteristics of social media platforms. Thirdly, value co-creation theory was discussed, with engagement on social media being highlighted as the key to value co-creation. Based on this literature review, a conceptual model was developed to guide the empirical research. The following chapter will discuss the chosen research methodology for the empirical research study.

## **4.0. CHAPTER FOUR: Methodology**

### **4.1. Introduction**

The methodology for this empirical study is presented within this chapter. Initially an overview of the research aims and objectives will be provided. Subsequently, the chosen research position for this study is discussed, followed by the presentation of the research strategy employed. This research employs a multiple case study design, with two primary research stages. An outline of the data analysis process is provided before the limitations of the research study are acknowledged. The structure of this chapter is presented in figure 4.1.

Eight teams from the Northern Ireland Football League that fit within the working definition of a semi-professional sports club were selected as cases. The NIFL is the only semi-professional league system in Northern Ireland where clubs may gain access to elite-level sport. Therefore, clubs from other sports in Northern Ireland were inappropriate as they did not fit the definition of a SSC for this study. Each case consisted of a minimum of one in-depth semi-structured interview with a club representative in charge of social media at the club, and two in-depth semi-structured interviews with fans of the club.



**Figure 4.1 – Methodology Chapter Structure**

## **4.2. Research Aim and Objectives**

The overall aim of this research study is to investigate social media application in SSCs to evaluate how value co-creation can be facilitated between a club and its fans.

The three research objectives are:

RO1: To evaluate the motivations for fan engagement with content from a SSC's social media communication.

RO2: To evaluate the perceived value of social media use and application as a marketing communications channel from the SSC's perspective.

RO3: To compare fans' and SSCs' perspectives regarding social media use to identify causes and barriers to co-creating value on social media between fans and clubs.

### **4.3. Research Position**

A key area of empirical research is to define the philosophical approach to be taken by the researcher. The two most commonly discussed approaches are interpretivism and positivism (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Carson et al. (2001) define positivist research as that which "concentrates on description and explanation where thought is governed by explicitly stated theories and hypotheses". Positivism is an epistemological position that applies research methods utilised in natural sciences, to social reality (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Specifically, it focuses on the application of existing research methods and strategy that have their roots in natural sciences, and applies these to the context of social sciences. The purpose of positivist research is in the generation of hypotheses which can be subsequently tested in order to derive explanations for the phenomena. The position of the researcher when undertaking positivist research must be entirely objective and free from bias and influencing personal beliefs (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Therefore, positive research relies on both a deductive approach to hypotheses generation, and an inductive research strategy to test these hypotheses (D. E. Gray, 2014). Within positivism, the underlying approach taken is in testing theoretical concepts and through this developing conclusions.

Interpretivism is a contrasting epistemology to positivism. There are many individuals who are critical of the direct application of a scientific model of research (positivism) to the real world, as social science and its core focus are fundamentally different from those within natural sciences (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Therefore, research itself will require a different underlying logic that reflects the distinctiveness of human nature

within social sciences. In other words, interpretivism is more closely related to developing an understanding of human nature in comparison to positivism which focuses on explaining it, and analysing the forces acting upon it (Carson et al., 2001; Creswell, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2015). This approach requires the researcher to understand the subjective meaning underpinning social and human actions, and interpret this without bias (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Creswell (2014) elaborates on this, suggesting that often within interpretivist research there is a reliance on the respondent's views of what is being studied. The researcher needs to then attempt to interpret what has been said and apply it to the context of the study. This process often relies on the collection of qualitative data so that the research aim can be satisfied.

Interpretivist research allows for a contribution to knowledge to be made through the development of existing theories. A distinguishing feature of positivist research is the focus on testing theories or hypotheses. Interpretivist research instead aims to build or generate theories (Carson et al., 2001). Existing theory can be utilised by the researcher to generate their own ideas that become the focus of the research (Saunders et al., 2016). This research builds on existing value co-creation literature, and to develop the area through evaluating its role in social media within semi-professional sports. Another significant characteristic of interpretivist research relevant to this study is the use of small sample sizes. Positivist studies tend to focus on larger samples which can lead to generalisability of findings. Interpretivist research instead focuses on understanding and explaining the research topic (Carson et al., 2001).

The choice of interpretivism or positivism also impacts on the role of the researcher. Often with an interpretivist approach, the researcher will attempt to experience what they are investigating, such as through ethnography. On the other hand, within positivist research, such methodological techniques would be inappropriate, as the researcher aims to be external and detached from the study to ensure objectivity (Carson et al., 2001). An important point proposed by Carson et al. (2001) is that marketing researchers should “appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience”. This is highly relevant to this study as the focus of RO1 is an interpretation of the experience individual fans have on social media regarding their supported club's content.

This study focuses on the process of value co-creation between a semi-professional sports club and its fans. Therefore, there are several factors to consider within the research area before defining the epistemological approach to be taken. Firstly, motivations behind consumer behaviour on social media plays a key role in RO1, whereby motives influencing engagement on social media are to be evaluated. Secondly, the existing process of social media application in clubs requires evaluation, and the value which these clubs receive will be interpreted through RO2. Thirdly, an evaluation of the gaps between current and best practice of social media will be undertaken. These three research objectives all focus on the interpretation of collected data, as opposed to the measurement and testing of hypotheses. Interpretivism centres on reality having meaning to human beings; consequently, human action and interaction also have meaning. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to investigate, interpret and evaluate the meaning behind these actions (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This makes the interpretivist position appropriate to this empirical study, as it focuses on identifying motivations behind consumer interaction on social media, and the impact of this from a business perspective.

#### **4.4. Methodological Choice**

A basic distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is that quantitative researchers employ methods of measurement, and qualitative researchers do not. Bryman and Bell (2015) suggest that the differences are deeper than this, and lie within the epistemological foundations of the research approach. Quantitative research is a strategy focusing on the quantification or measurement in the collection and analysis of data. Like positivist research, it employs a deductive approach where hypotheses or theories are tested (Creswell, 2014). Unlike interpretivist approaches, within quantitative research, social reality is external and objective (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In other words, qualitative research is a strategy which focuses on words as opposed to measurement or quantification of collected data and in its analysis (Carson et al., 2001). Within qualitative research, theories are generated through an inductive approach; therefore, it generally employs an interpretivist approach as opposed to positivist (Bazeley, 2013; Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Qualitative methods are appropriate for marketing management research due to flexibility and the ability to interpret different situations. Furthermore, the focus on

developing an in-depth understanding of the research area is important due to the complex nature of marketing (Carson et al., 2001). Creswell (2014) identifies several characteristics of a qualitative research problem. Firstly, there may be a lack of theory on the topic area. Secondly, there may be a need for exploration and explanation of the area to provide greater understanding on it. Thirdly, quantitative measurement may not be an appropriate methodological choice for the area. These characteristics apply to this empirical study. There is little research conducted in the context of SSCs, and none regarding effective social media marketing. Additionally, the use of social media in clubs requires research to provide an understanding on effective application. Finally, due to the need to interpret individual experiences in the area, quantitative research techniques would be inappropriate for data collection.

A criticism of qualitative research is the influence of personal values or beliefs on data collection or its interpretation (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Gray (2014) adds that often qualitative data that has been collected can be open to multiple interpretations which can be influenced by the researcher's values or beliefs. Richards (2014) identifies that bias is present in all qualitative and quantitative research; the focus should be on presenting the interpreted data honestly and openly to avoid any negative implications.

As the aim of this research was to gain insights into fans' and social media operator's perceptions of social media use by SSCs to facilitate value co-creation, a qualitative approach was used. RO1 focuses on evaluation of consumer (fan) motivations to engage with social media content, and therefore requires this approach. Likewise, RO2 will focus on evaluating value from a club's perspective through social media application. This again requires a qualitative approach to identify and interpret these values. RO3 focuses on evaluating gaps between current and best practice of social media marketing in SSCs. Again, this will require interpretation of collected data. Through this process, a strategic framework will emerge from the collected data to satisfy the overall research aim.

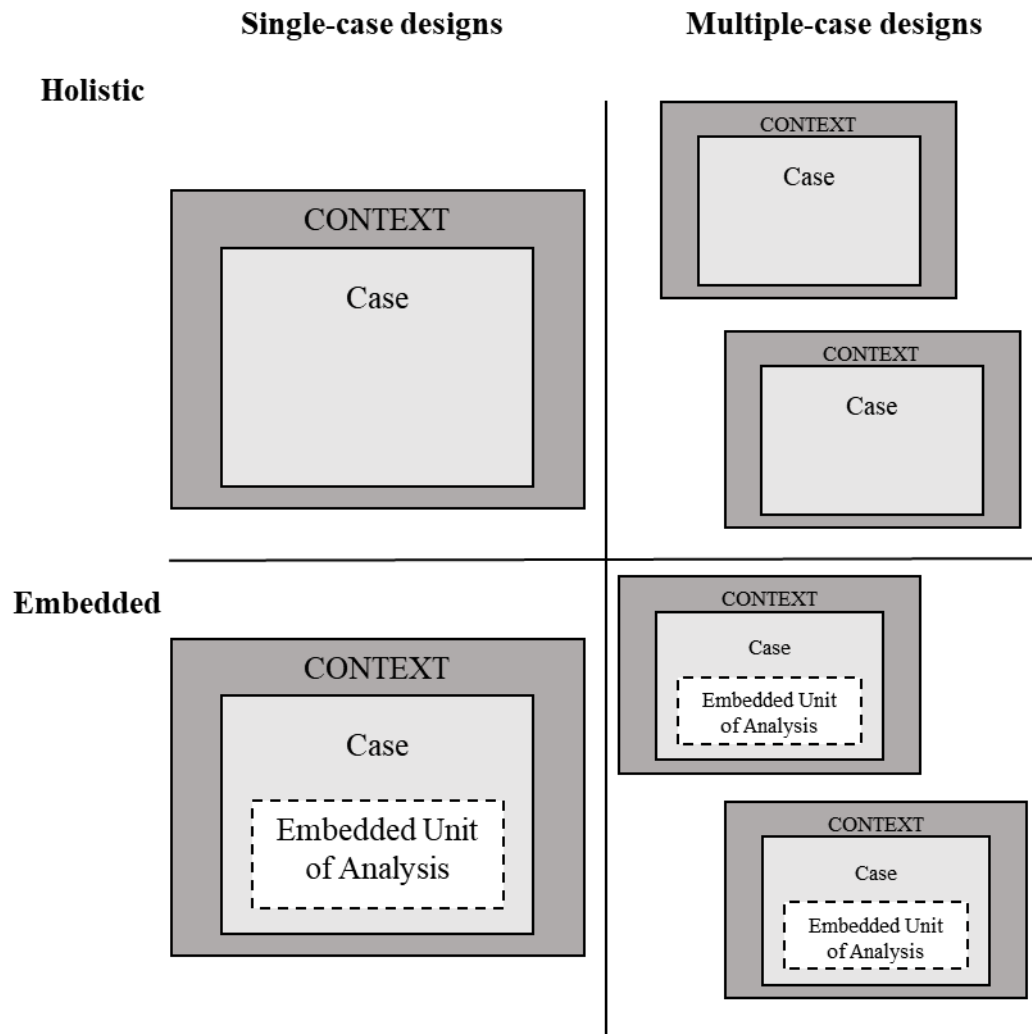
#### **4.5. Research Strategy**

Case study research is most commonly used to describe research associated with a workplace or organisation, and involves extensive evaluation of the unique context of the case (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Each case is the focus of interest within case study research; the role of the researcher is to provide clarification on this. In other words, a

distinguishing factor of case studies is the importance placed on the unique features and characteristics of the case by the researcher (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This research uses a case study approach, as the researcher aims to evaluate social media application in the unique context of specific semi-professional sports clubs. Furthermore, each club may utilise social media in a unique manner; therefore, it is important that an approach involving multiple clubs as cases will be undertaken.

Yin (2018) identifies four types of case study research design. These are: single-case (holistic), single-case (embedded), multiple-case (holistic), and multiple-case (embedded). Figure 4.2 highlights this in a 2x2 matrix. Single-case design is an appropriate choice where justification could be made for a single experiment. Multiple cases are utilised when comparisons across cases may be required. Holistic cases involve one unit of analysis across the case, and embedded occur when multiple units of analysis are required (Yin, 2012). This research uses a multiple-case (embedded) approach, as eight case studies were studied. Within each case there are multiple units of analysis. RO1 is concerned with fan value as a unit of analysis. RO2 focuses on value from the perspective of the SSC. RO3 evaluates barriers and constraints on social media application, and uses gaps between current and best practice as a form of analysis.





**Figure 4.2 – Types of Case Study Design (Yin, 2018).**

Multiple case study design is an extension of case study research, where multiple cases are used. It is an approach often applied in business and management research. Additionally, it falls within the category of comparative design, as the purpose for this approach relies on comparisons between the cases from which data is collected (Bryman and Bell, 2015). A key advantage is that this comparison can aid the researcher in identifying both unique and common themes across collected data, improving theoretical reflection upon these findings. The key difference between multiple case study design and cross sectional design is in the focus; while multiple cases focus on the unique context of the cases, cross sectional research does not place importance on this (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

A multiple-case (embedded) design was used as SSC's may operate social media in different ways and therefore the fans of one particular club may have different views

on social media usage than fans of other clubs (Bryman and Bell, 2015). It is also important to pair the opinions of a club's fans with the social media application of that club. In other words, what one fan experiences on social media from their supported club may not be applicable to another club, as they may utilise social media in a different manner. It also may be important to separate the teams into individual cases as they may feel more open to sharing information about the motives behind their use of social media (Creswell, 2014). This can be an issue in SSCs as they may not want to provide information that would provide a competitive advantage to other organisations within the league body. Most importantly, the utilisation of multiple cases will allow for cross-case analysis, where comparisons can be drawn between each case (Carson et al., 2001; Yin, 2012; Yin, 2018). This is a necessary step for this research, which aims to develop the most effective application of social media within these clubs. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge instances of best practice where they appear within the collected data, and compare this with other cases.

#### **4.6. Case Selection**

Carson et al. (2001) identify the importance of replication when using multiple cases. These cases are often selected based on relevance to the topic area as opposed to representativeness. Yin (2018) identifies that in some research areas a multiple case study design is more robust, as findings compared across multiple cases are seen as more substantial. Multiple case design is similar to conducting multiple experiments through replication as opposed to following a sampling design or other methodological choices (Yin, 2018). "Case selection follows an analogous logic; the cases will either display similar results or contrasting results for anticipatable reasons" (Yin, 2018). This study has selected multiple cases that follow this logic. SSCs selected operate within similar conditions, with similar features and in the same national league; therefore, the cases share similar characteristics. This study uses a multiple-case approach that employs comparative design. Comparative design is used because the understanding of certain phenomena can be improved when research is based upon two or more contrasting cases (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The eight cases in this study will be compared and contrasted to find both unique and common themes that appear in the data, with the purpose of developing a strategic framework as the overall research aim. Pope et al. (2000) identifies that qualitative research does not follow

traditional sampling strategies as qualitative studies do not look to find a statistically representative number of respondents. Therefore, while eight cases may not be statistically representative it provided enough depth of findings due to the relevance of cases to the research area.

The eight clubs chosen as cases to study all fit within the working definition of a SSC: *a semi-professional sports club which operates as a profit-for-development organisation, has paid professional athletes or players, relies on volunteer support staff, and aspires to compete at higher levels of sport by developing the club through business practices* (Gallagher et al., 2009; Gilmore et al., 2011; Gallagher et al., 2012). Therefore, these clubs are suited to the aim of the research, as they will suffer from limited resources that need efficient application to achieve organisational and marketing goals.

The primary criteria for choosing fan respondents in this study was that the respondent must follow the club on at least one social media channel. Additionally, the respondents must be over the age of eighteen and not be considered vulnerable adults. Ideally, respondents will be willing to openly discuss feelings they have when interacting with social media of the club and what value they receive from doing so (Creswell, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2015). Insights into how they may wish social media to be used would also be helpful in relation to the aim of this study. Apart from age, there are no other demographic requirements for the sample. Academic literature (Clavio, 2011; Carlson and O'Cass, 2012; Clavio and Walsh, 2014) suggests that the most likely consumers to interact with an organisation via social media are those who are already loyal. In regards to club representatives, the respondent must be responsible for the social media channels of the club. This is important as it will facilitate discussion during interview on how and why social media is used within the SSC in a particular manner.

Table 4.1 highlights the different cases used in this study, and identifies the number of fan respondents and club representatives that were interviewed.

<b>Case Number</b>	<b>Club</b>	<b>No. of Fan Respondents</b>	<b>No. of Club Representatives</b>
1	C1	2	1
2	C2	2	1
3	C3	5	1
4	C4	3	1
5	C5	2	1
6	C6	2	3
7	C7	2	1
8	C8	2	1

**Table 4.1 – Cases and number of respondents.**

#### **4.7. Timeframe**

Cross-sectional design entails the collection of data on more than one case, and at a single point in time to collect a body of qualitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables, which are examined to detect patterns of association (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2016). Saunders et al. (2016) add that while surveys are often a common method for cross-sectional research, case studies that employ interviews over a short period of time also constitute cross-sectional research. Longitude design is concerned with the collection of data over a prolonged period, at multiple points in time. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are concerned with the collection and measurement of data over a period of time. This research is not concerned with the development of social media over time in clubs; the aim was to develop a strategic framework that can direct social media application more effectively highlighting the cross-sectional nature of this study. Future research could have a longitudinal focus where the use of the framework over a period of time could develop it further.

#### **4.8. Research Stages**

Each case study comprised of an in-depth semi-structured interview with the social media manager at the club, and of at least two in-depth semi-structured interviews with fans (Cuneen and Tobar, 2015). The complete empirical study consists of ten in-

depth semi-structured interviews with club representatives. There were seventeen in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with fans, and one focus group consisting of three fans (Creswell, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2015). Club respondents and individual fans will remain anonymous (Creswell, 2014).

Semi-structured interview is a common technique in qualitative research. It involves the use of an interview guide, which is a list of question areas or topics to be covered during the interview (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This allows for a great deal of flexibility. Prior to development of the interview guide, the researcher must clearly identify the overall aim of the research (Carson et al., 2001). For example, the interviewer may ask questions not on the guide to investigate further on points the interviewee may have raised that are relevant to the research area. Another feature of the semi-structured interview is the focus on what the interviewee sees as important in their understanding of questioning (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In other words, questions may be interpreted differently by different respondents. How this is framed in their opinion is important and will have a subsequent impact on the findings.

Creswell (2014) outlines three advantages of interviewing as a qualitative data collection technique. Firstly, it is useful when participants cannot be directly observed. This applies to the empirical study in that the value experienced from a fan's perspective (RO1) cannot be observed, and must be interpreted through dialogue. Similarly, SSC value of social media application follows this pattern. Secondly, participants in the study will be able to provide historical examples and evidence on the research area. This is useful as respondents will be able to discuss their perceptions of value over a period of time of using social media. It may allow them to provide relevant information on examples of value they experience infrequently. It is important to note this does not make the focus of the study longitudinal; the intent is to discuss past experiences and values with fans, as opposed to measuring development. Thirdly, the researcher is able to control and direct questioning. This allows the researcher to ensure that throughout the interview, topics that are required to be covered on the interview guide get discussed.

A limitation of in-depth interviews that are potentially relevant to this study is that the data being collected is from the perspective of the interviewee, and may be biased. This could be an issue due to the nature of sports consumer loyalty. Cuneen and Tobar

(2015) also note the possibility for bias in sport based research, due to the passionate nature of consumers (as fans). This research aims to avoid potential bias, as questions developed looked at purpose, intent, and individual value relating to the respondent as opposed to focusing on their relationship with the particular club they supported. A second limitation is that the presence of the researcher may influence responses. This could have an impact when interviewing club representatives who wished to avoid critique on current social media application (Creswell, 2014).

Using semi-structured interviews as opposed to unstructured provides an advantage for the researcher. More specific issues can be addressed in the questioning if the research study has a clear focus (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This empirical study has a clear research aim; therefore, an approach utilising semi-structured interviews was the most effective in achieving this. Additionally, it was important to maintain some structure to the interview process when multiple case studies are being conducted. This is to ensure cross-case comparability, an important step in the analysis of collected data (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Focus groups are considered an ideal way of receiving multiple opinions on topics to achieve some form of consensus (Berg et al., 2004; Patton, 2005). They can explore in-depth a specific topic that is part of the overall research aim. It allows for the researcher to experience how respondents interact when discussing a topic as a group, as opposed to individually (Bryman and Bell, 2015). A key feature is that the researcher may gain greater depth of findings from an insight into responses between individuals as opposed to individual answers to questioning. Discussion between individuals in the group may also improve the depth of findings, as they may challenge each other on their responses (Bryman and Bell, 2015). While in many areas this would be an advantage, it was discovered that discussion between fans of sports organisations was counter-productive due to the nature of sport and sports consumers (Cuneen and Tobar, 2015). In the context of this study, sport focus groups presented a major challenge. When conducted with fans of a club, the focus group setting led to a more argumentative atmosphere. The initial stage one research was intended to be conducted with focus groups; however, it was deemed an unsuitable method due to the nature of sport and passionate supporters. Most clubs that had multiple members of a social media team did so because they were not all available at the same time.

This resulted in focus groups being difficult to organise with limited volunteer availability in the majority of clubs studied.

Where permission is given from respondents, interviews can be recorded. During semi-structured interviews the interviewer's attention is on follow-up questioning to responses as opposed to extensive detail in note-taking (Bryman and Bell, 2015), therefore recorded interviews were useful. While transcribing is a time-intensive task, it allows the researcher to identify emergent themes from the data, which has important implications in multiple-stage research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Cuneen and Tobar, 2015). The interviews in this research were recorded with participants' permission.

Yin (2018) highlights the importance of being adaptive as a researcher when collecting data for case studies. This includes during interviews where follow-up questions can be useful if interesting points are raised by the respondent that were unexpected. Additionally it is within the techniques of data collection used. This is of particular relevance to this study where it was discovered focus groups may be an unsuitable form of data collection. This research utilised follow-up questions regarding information provided by respondents. This was in relation to their levels of loyalty, social media value, and motives for engagement.

#### **4.8.1. Stage One: In-depth Interviews with Fans**

Stage one of the research consisted of semi-structured in-depth interviews which were conducted with fans of the eight SSCs that were selected as cases for this study. The purpose of research stage one was to fulfil RO1 through the evaluation of value from the perspective of the fans in SSC social media use. This also contributes data towards RO3 where identification of gaps between the application of social media in SSCs and the value which fans wish to receive can be identified. In other words, not providing the value fans wish to receive is limiting the potential for value co-creation to occur, and for mutual benefit to be achieved.

Interviews with fans were conducted in a room at Ulster University booked for this purpose, or conducted at the club when requested by the respondent (Patton, 2005; Creswell, 2014). In addition, multiple interviews were conducted via the video conferencing software, Skype. This enable several interviews to be conducted where the respondent would otherwise not have been able to attend. While this is a relatively

new setting for interviews in academic research, several authors have acknowledged it as a legitimate alternative to face-to-face interviewing (Hanna, 2012; Deakin and Wakefield, 2014; Seitz, 2016). There were no obvious limitations to using Skype in this study. Interviews were recorded where permission was granted from the respondent, and were transcribed using NVivo for later analysis (Richards, 1999; Bazeley, 2013). All data was saved on a cloud-based storage device to avoid issues concerning data loss or corruption. Question guidelines were developed, and tailored based on answers received during interview (Berg et al., 2004; Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Initially, questions were asked to determine the level of behavioural loyalty of the respondent to the club which they support. This included asking how often they attended, and whether they were a season ticket holder. Following this, questions regarding the personal social media use of the individual were asked. This was to determine the platforms most used, and their typical social media behaviour; whether or not they contributed or engaged with content. Respondents were asked what content they valued or desired from clubs to determine fan social media value, and to identify new themes of value which may exist. Additionally, respondents were asked what motivated their engagement with social media content from SSCs, and in professional sport. This was to identify gaps in current and best practice from the perspective of fans. Fans were asked to compare the social media experience between semi-professional clubs and professional to provide data regarding differences between the sporting contexts.

#### **4.8.2. Stage Two: In-depth Interviews with SSC Representatives**

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the individuals in charge of social media at the clubs (Berg et al., 2004; Neuman, 2005; Patton, 2005). The individual in charge of social media is responsible for the content provided and how these channels are used, and is therefore responsible for achieving organisational objectives at a practical level. If organisational goals are to be achieved more effectively, these goals must be identified, as must current practices to show where improvements to efficiency can be made. The purpose of stage two of the research was to fulfil RO2 and RO3. Carson et al. (2001) identify that in small businesses it can be difficult to get a large number of interviews. This was true for club respondents as



often there was one volunteer taking the lead on social media, with other team members volunteering on days the primary volunteer was unavailable.

Interviews with SSC representatives were conducted in a room at Ulster University booked for this purpose, or conducted at the club when requested by the respondent (Patton, 2005; Creswell, 2014). All interviews conducted at club facilities were held in a quiet environment where the interview would not be interrupted to allow for audio recordings to be taken. In addition, multiple interviews were conducted via the video conferencing software, Skype. Again, interviews were recorded where permission was granted from the respondent, and were transcribed using NVivo for later analysis (Richards, 1999; Bazeley, 2013). All data was saved on a cloud-based storage device to avoid issues concerning data loss or corruption. Question guidelines were developed, and tailored based on answers received during interview (Berg et al., 2004; Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Interviews with club representatives began by clarifying the individual's role at the club. This included the identification of resources available, such as the number of members of their social media team. Following this, respondents were asked questions to evaluate the primary purpose or aim of social media use within clubs. Questions were asked regarding how the club were using social media and the type of content they were providing to fans. Club representatives were also asked what they considered as value from social media application, and whether this was being experienced by the club from current practice. The final area of questioning focused on fan feedback received on social media, and any issues that the club were experiencing in social media application.

#### **4.9. Data Analysis**

Qualitative research often involves a large volume of data being collected and transcribed from interviews. The two most commonly cited forms of qualitative data analysis are analytical induction and grounded theory (Bryman and Bell, 2015). When analysing research, often themes or categories are both used deductively from the beginning of the analysis, and inductively where themes emerge from the data itself (Pope et al., 2000).

Analytical induction involves seeking out explanations for phenomena in the data that becomes consistent across all cases, whereas grounded theory involves derivation of the theory from the data itself (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This study used analytical induction, which involved defining a research aim or question, with an extensive literature review conducted to provide an explanation and outline of the area. Following this, data was collected in order to meet the research aim (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The process allowed for flexibility in data collection and analysis. If inconsistencies are discovered between cases, the research can redefine the initial hypothesis or reformulate it. This process continues until there are no inconsistencies left between cases (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Yin (2018) discusses this strategy for data analysis within case studies, identifying that the researcher follows the theoretical preposition that led to the development of the case initially. This means following key themes in the data that closely relate to the initial research aim. This approach is utilised within this empirical study as data was analysed with the intent of meeting the overall research aim. As such, data relating to fan value on social media was analysed for RO1. SSC interpretation of value from social media application was necessary for RO2. RO3 relied on data being analysed relating to barriers toward social media application in SSCs. Therefore, data was analysed in relation to the theoretical prepositions for this study. Key themes drawn from the literature focused on value as central to the facilitation of engagement on social media. The values which fans experienced identified from the literature included entertainment, socialising, identification with the club, and functional values (Stavros et al., 2014; Filo et al., 2015).

Qualitative data analysis often begins with a content analysis being conducted on the transcripts. The first stage of a content analysis involves the coding of words and phrases within the data into categories relating to the research area (Carson et al., 2001). Following this, comparisons can be drawn between the categories. This second stage is called selective coding, where the researcher draws situations from the codes that identify key themes from the data. A common criticism of coding in analysis of qualitative data is the context of what has been said by respondents may get lost. Additionally, data becomes fragmented. This exacerbates the issue of losing context, whereby the narrative of an interview may become lost through extracting only small segments from the data (Bryman and Bell, 2015). To overcome this issue, data analysis

and its presentation was guided by the conceptual model which highlighted key themes for the empirical study.

This study utilised NVivo 11, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to aid in coding and organisation of the data and in its analysis. Yin (2012; 2018) highlights the usefulness of CAQDAS. However, the author notes that a researcher must remain aware that it is just software to assist analysis and does not analyse the data autonomously.

#### **4.9.1. Stage One Analysis**

The first stage of data analysis involved the transcription of recorded interviews. Once this was completed, NVivo 11 was used to facilitate the content analysis of the transcripts. For RO1 several themes of value had been identified prior to data analysis from the literature review. These categories included entertainment value, functional value, symbolic value (fan identification) and social value (Stavros et al., 2014; Filo et al., 2015). However, new categories emerged when coding the transcripts such as experiential value. NVivo was used to store and organise this data for use when drawing comparisons between identified categories of value. In total, transcripts from twenty fans were analysed that had been collected from stage one of the research. In chapter five, an overview is provided of the findings from fan interviews relating to two of the cases. The analysis from these transcripts is presented in chapter six, where cross-case comparisons are drawn. This led to the development of a theoretical model that identifies the process of engagement with social media content from a fan's perspective.

#### **4.9.2. Stage Two Analysis**

The analysis of data collected from research stage two involved the transcription of interviews with club representatives. NVivo 11 was used to complete a content analysis on these transcripts and to organise the data. Themes of club value from social media emerged from analysis of the data. Similar to stage one analysis, comparisons were drawn between themes of value. The data within these transcripts also contained themes of how social media was utilised in SSCs, which was pertinent to RO3. In total, transcripts from ten club representatives were analysed. Chapter five presents findings of two cases. Chapter seven contains a cross-case analysis of all eight transcripts and

presents a model displaying current social media application in clubs with the value they experience.

The primary purpose of this research was to evaluate how social media can be utilised in SSCs to co-create value with fans. To address this aim, a strategic framework was developed, based on an analysis of data, underpinned by the conceptual model developed to guide the research (fig 3.5).

#### **4.10. Ethics**

Gray (2014) identifies four key ethical principles in academic research. These are: to avoid harm to participants; to ensure the informed consent of respondents; to respect the privacy of respondents; and to avoid the use of deception. This study employed these principles through the process of data collection and analysis.

The confidentiality of identification of respondents has been ensured by the researcher through the use of pseudonyms. Each respondent was given a code that would respond to identify them and the club they supported. For example, 'C2F1' is C2 Fan One. Fans were made aware before the interview of the aim of this research, and the key topics were highlighted: their support of the club, their social media use, and value they see in social media. This was to make clear the purpose of the research, and to avoid deception of respondents, an ethical issue in social research (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Respondents were asked for permission at the beginning of interview for the researcher to make an audio recording for later transcription. At this stage the respondent was made aware they would remain anonymous. Interviews with club representatives also followed the same process to ensure confidentiality. Club names are presented in the thesis for ease of reading; however, they will be omitted from externally published work to keep clubs anonymous. Representatives from each club were also given a pseudonym to ensure individual privacy. For example, 'C6R1' is C6 Representative One. Ulster University Business School provided ethical approval for this research study.

#### **4.11. Limitations of Study**

The use of focus groups was deemed inappropriate as a technique to use to collect data from fans for RO1 and RO3. This was due to the passion involved in sports

consumerism and fandom (Cuneen and Tobar, 2015) and discord amongst fans. The key limitation was the lack of clubs that fit within the working definition of a semi-professional sports club in Northern Ireland. This empirical study had to focus on football clubs, as within Northern Ireland these were the only clubs that were administered primarily by volunteers, had paid staff and had the ability and desire to compete at the elite level of sporting competition. However, this study is not claiming generalisability due to the interpretivist nature of the research. Furthermore, there were a limited number of representatives available for interview from each club due to the lack of resources.

#### **4.12. Chapter Summary**

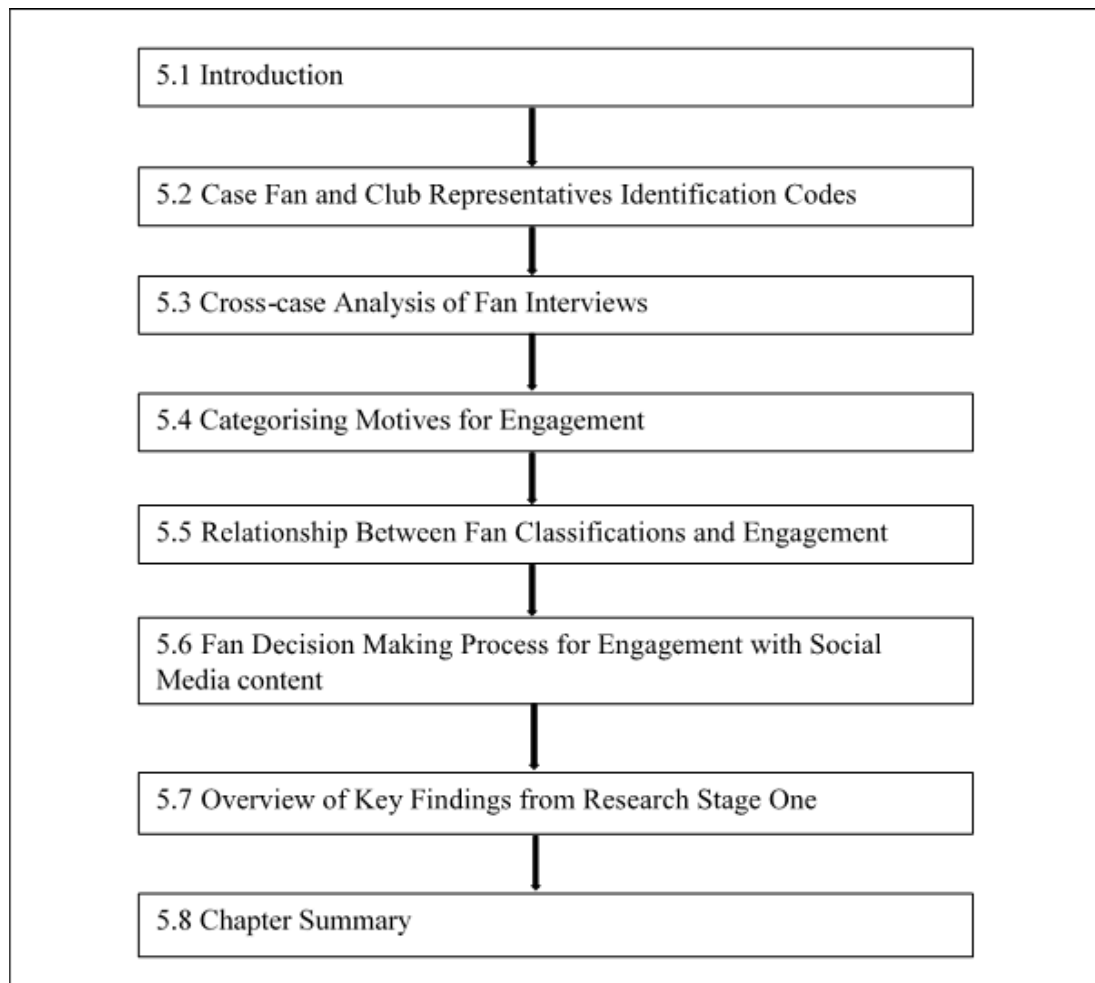
This chapter provided an analysis of the research methods to be employed for empirical study. An overview of interpretivist research was provided, and its justification in relation to a case study approach being utilised. This research involved two primary stages: interviews with club fans and interviews with club representatives. The data was coded and analysed using an inductive approach, with the aid of NVivo 11 to organise data. Ethical approval for this research study was provided by Ulster University Business School. The primary limitation of the research was the small sample of clubs that fit within the definition of a semi-professional sports club within Northern Ireland. The following chapter will present the findings of the empirical study.

## **5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: Research Stage One Data Analysis**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents an analysis of the data from stage one of the empirical study. This stage consisted of in-depth fan interviews. These fans were categorised into fan segments based on the conceptual model presented in the literature review. An outline of the values fans experience from social media use is provided. An evaluation of the key factors motivating engagement with social media is then presented, along with the development of a model illustrating this process. The structure of this chapter is presented in figure 5.1.

It should be noted that within the following chapters, the term ‘fan’ (non-capitalised) is used to refer to an existing supporter or follower of a club. The term ‘Fan’ (capitalised) is used to describe the consumption category relating to level of loyalty in which a particular individual exists.



**Figure 5.1 – Research Stage One Data Analysis Chapter Structure**

## 5.2. Case Fan and Club Representative Identification Codes

The anonymity of respondents as both fans and club representatives of this study was ensured prior to interview. Therefore, codes have been used to replace the names of individuals. Below is a brief outline of the number of respondents within each case and their identification code.

Case One (C1) was C1 which consisted of one interview with a club social media advisor and two interviews with club fans (Table 5.1).

Case One	Representative	Fan
C1	C1R1	C1F1, C1F2

**Table 5.1 – Case One Identification Codes**

Case Two (C2) was C2 which consisted of one interview with a club social media manager and two interviews with club fans (Table 5.2).

Case Two	Representative	Fan
C2	C2R1	C2F1, C2F2

**Table 5.2 – Case Two Identification Codes**

Case Three (C3) was C3 which consisted of one interview with a club social media account manager and five interviews with club fans (Table 5.3).

Case Three	Representative	Fan
C3	C3R1	C3F1, C3F2, C3F3, C3F4, C3F5

**Table 5.3 – Case Three Identification Codes**

Case Four (C4) was C4 which consisted of one interview with a club social media manager and one focus group with three club fans (Table 5.4).

Case Four	Representative	Fan
C4	C4R1	C4F1, C4F2, C4F3

**Table 5.4 – Case Four Identification Codes**

Case Five (C5) was C5 which consisted of one interview with a club social media manager and two interview with club fans (Table 5.5).

<b>Case Five</b>	<b>Representative</b>	<b>Fan</b>
C5	C5R1	C5F1, C5F2

**Table 5.5 – Case Five Identification Codes**

Case Six (C6) was C6 which consisted of three in-depth interviews with three club social media managers and two interviews with club fans (Table 5.6).

<b>Case Six</b>	<b>Representative</b>	<b>Fan</b>
C6	C6R1, C6R2, C6R3	C6F1, C6F2

**Table 5.6 – Case Six Identification Codes**

Case Seven (C7) was C7 which consisted of one interview with a club social media manager and two interviews with club fans (Table 5.7).

<b>Case Seven</b>	<b>Representative</b>	<b>Fan</b>
C7	C7R1	C7F1, C7F2

**Table 5.7 – Case Seven Identification Codes**

Case Eight (C8) was C8 which consisted of one interview with a club social media manager and two interviews with club fans (Table 5.8).

<b>Case Eight</b>	<b>Representative</b>	<b>Fan</b>
C8	C8R1	C8F1, C8F2

**Table 5.8 – Case Eight Identification Codes**

### **5.3.Cross-case Analysis of Fan Interviews**

Fan interviews were analysed to identify common themes of value, relating to RO1. This will contribute to the research aim by identifying the key factors in engagement decision-making from followers of SSCs on social media. The respondents interviewed as fans of the club will be categorised into four segments of fan that have been adapted from Fillis and Mackay (2014): Casual Follower, Social Devotee, Fan,



and Committed Supporter. Non-consumers were not interviewed as they were unlikely to engage with social media content from SSCs, and these findings would not address the research objectives.

### **5.3.1. Respondents and Fan Classification**

Respondents for the interviews regarding stage one of primary research were identified due to their pre-existing attachment to the club. They discussed how they utilised social media, and their motives for sharing SSC social media content within their existing networks. While their consumption levels dictated they were not attached to a club, their social media behaviour suggested otherwise. Therefore, respondents interviewed could be categorised into the four highest consumption tiers from the conceptual framework, that is Committed Supporters, Fans, Social Devotees and Casual Followers, and are shown with respective categories in table 5.9.

It was important to categorise the respondents into different categories based on consumption level for two reasons. Firstly, it allows a comparison of the identified codes and themes of value, and share motives between fans of different levels. This means that there are certain values that a particular level of fandom desires more than another. For example, functional value in social media may provide more benefit to Committed Supporters as they might be able to take advantage of it more often than a Casual Follower. Secondly, it will help identify if there are different social media usage behaviours based on how loyal an individual is to a club. Individuals who are more loyal to a club may also be more likely to consume their social media content on multiple platforms, or at a more rapid pace than individuals who are not as attached. This research prioritised behavioural loyalty when discussing the categories of fans as opposed to attitudinal.

#### **5.3.1.1. Overview of Classification Criteria**

The criteria for each category of fan within this research are outlined below:

Committed Supporters attend over ninety percent of matches of their supported club per season, showing their allegiance to the team. They have developed this allegiance to the team over a period of time. They are generally season ticket holders.

Fans attend less than 90% of matches of their supported team. They may not make the effort to travel to away matches. They may be season ticket holders of their respective club. While they display allegiance to their club, they often have other priorities that make attending every match impossible.

Social Devotees attend up to ten games per season. They are influenced to attend because of social value they experience. They may also manifest this through their social media use, and follow results of their teams online or through other mediums. These fans may have an attachment to the club, but do not prioritise attendance over other commitments.

Casual Followers only attend around three matches per season. They may not have developed any level of attachment to the club. However, fans with high attitudinal loyalty to the club may have moved to this category because they cannot attend matches due to certain circumstances, such as travel difficulties.

It should also be noted that these respondents were categorised into the classification which best suited them at the time of the interview. Many respondents existed previously within a different category, but due to circumstances, had changed the regularity of their attendance and therefore had reduced consumption levels. For example, Respondent C1F1 identifies that he only attends 1-2 matches per year (Casual Follower): *“So I’ve moved away, and I live in England as you know, so I only get to one or two games a year, and that’s all I’ve been able to manage for the last kinda, three, four years now”* (C1F1). However, he refers to the past and states he made it to around 50% of home matches each season, which would be classed as a Social Devotee. Similarly, C8F2 has relocated and can no longer attend matches regularly. However, he did not move category and has always been classed as a Casual Follower: *“Recently I moved to England so it’s not really convenient to travel back but I was going up until 2-3 years ago”* (C8F2).

#### **5.3.1.2. Applied Classification of Fan Respondents**

Committed supporters were those who attended the vast majority of matches that their respective team played, with attendance being 90%+ of matches each season. These fans showed the highest levels of allegiance to the club, and three respondents from the interviews fit within this category. Respondent C3F1 describes the level of

commitment shown by individuals within this fan category: *“I don’t miss a match now. The past since...2013 season I’ve probably missed max two matches a season that includes friendlies. I mean this year from when we started pre-season friendlies at the end of June I’ve only missed one match and that was a friendly against Larne”* (C3F1).

Two respondents identified as Fans, who attended over ten games per season on average but would not necessarily make efforts to travel to all away matches, resulting in attendance levels of less than 90%. These respondents showed levels of allegiance to the club, but were less likely to prioritise their support for the club over other commitments (unlike the Committed Supporters). Respondent C7F1 is quoted, discussing his inability to attend more often due to work: *“Twice a month now because I work two Saturdays on and then two off so I go at least twice a month. And then the mid-week matches as well – as many as possible really”* (C7F1).

Social Devotees were classed as individuals who would attend up to ten games per season, and were more likely to attend due to social commitments or experience. Three respondents were within this consumption level; however all three had explained that in the past they had been more committed to attending matches. Respondent C2F1 suggests that he has become less attached to the club over time, and attending matches is something he has “grown out of”: *“I would say I used to attend maybe 5 to 10 times a year...Of recent I’ve been to a couple of games. However, as I’ve got older it’s something I’ve actually grown out of”* (C2F1).

The final class which respondents from stage one were categorised into was the Casual Follower. This category only attended a minimal amount of games per season (three or less) which could be due to circumstances (travel difficulties) or lack of attachment to the club and therefore less desire to attend. One respondent C3F3, who only started attending matches this season identified his initial attraction for attending as university coursework, and how it developed into attending on multiple occasions: *“I mean I wasn’t interested before this module and now it’s one of those things where if you give it a go you’d be pleasantly surprised; so I was pleasantly surprised whenever we went to three C3 games, I was just really surprised how good the football actually was”* (C3F3). Even though he states he was “pleasantly surprised”, there is no identification of an attachment to the team. Therefore, individuals within this category can be seen as having an initial attraction to the team, but have not undergone the process of

attraction developing into attachment. Table 6.9 shows all fan respondents and their classifications.

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Consumer Category</b>
C3F1	Committed Supporter
C1F1	Casual Follower
C3F2	Social Devotee
C2F1	Social Devotee
C7F1	Fan
C7F2	Fan
C3F3	Casual Follower
C3F4	Committed Supporter
C6F1	Committed Supporter
C3F5	Social Devotee
C4F1	Fan
C4F2	Fan
C4F3	Committed Supporter
C5F1	Social Devotee
C8F1	Committed Supporter
C1F2	Casual Follower
C2F2	Casual Follower
C5F2	Casual Follower
C6F2	Committed Supporter
C8F2	Casual Follower

**Table 5.9 – Respondents and Their Associated Consumer Category**

### **5.3.2. Respondent Social Media Usage Behaviour**

An important part of the stage one interviews was to identify the key differences in how fans at different loyalty levels used social media. This would have an impact on how they perceived club value, and what value they prioritised, caused by differences in social media platform and frequency of use. A key finding regarding this was that fans not only differed in how often they used social media, and the value they sought from a club's content, but also how they were using social media itself. This has key implications for both the conceptual framework and the following stages of research. There are two ways in which the findings regarding social media use will be presented and investigated. Firstly, the behavioural use will be assessed (how social media was used), and secondly the platforms that individuals used will be analysed.

A key finding from the research indicated that social media fans could actively or passively consume social media content. This has clear implications for research surrounding a concept of engaging with social media content to raise awareness. Passive and active consumption in the context of social media usage in sport will be analysed below, and the implications for the conceptual model and subsequent stages of research will be evaluated.

#### **5.3.2.1. Passive Social Media Behaviour**

Passive consumption of social media describes behaviour involving reading, or consuming existing information. Passive consumption does not contribute original content (on a frequent basis) to social media, and are less likely to consistently interact with social media content, other than to gather information. Respondent C2F1 provides an example of passive behaviour: *"I would be more of a user than a contributor in my opinion...I would use it to gather information rather than to promote a message of my own."* (C2F1). Here C2F1 describes his passive behaviour on social media – through not contributing to social media, he prioritises it for gathering information. Similarly, C3F2 identifies that he uses social media to keep informed, while also suggesting that he does not actively contribute to Facebook. Respondent C3F2 also suggests that his preference for receiving this information is through Twitter, implying that platform also has an impact on value of social media: *"With Facebook I don't write statuses – I would get more of my information about football*

– *especially football, and especially Irish league from Twitter rather than Facebook*” (C3F2). The preference for a particular platform among consumers to facilitate passive social media consumption will have practical implications for SSCs, as multiple channels will need to be supported to maintain fan satisfaction.

#### **5.3.2.2. Active Social Media Behaviour**

Active consumption involves a more interactive approach, where an individual will engage with posts, through commenting, sharing or creating their own content. Respondent C3F1 identifies how she actively uses Facebook to share content. C3F1 not only describes the type of content she shares, but also the implication of doing so; that it will appear for other people to see: *“If I’ve just happened to be on my news feed and something’s came up about C3, about tickets or about something and it’s just happened there and then, I’ll share it and you’ll find a lot of the other C3 ones will share it so basically it’s going to appear”* (C3F1).

Therefore, users engaging in active behaviour are aware that their actions will have an impact on their social networks. Because of this, it can be proposed that highly loyal fans, who are also actively use social media will be motivated to engage with a club’s social media content because they know it will be of benefit to the club.

#### **5.3.2.3. Implications of Active/Passive Social Media Behaviour**

It should also be identified that neither category is mutually exclusive; both categories are used to describe the typical behaviour of the individual – it is possible for characteristically passive users to interact with certain posts, and typically active users to passively consume information. An example of this is respondent C3F1 who discusses her passive (infrequent) use of Twitter in comparison to a more regular engagement with Facebook: *“I mean I have Facebook, I have Twitter. Twitter I don’t overly use too much – I’d use it to keep up to date with C3 and the other Irish league kind of stuff, but I wouldn’t be tweeting every single day of the week. Facebook I would use a lot more regularly”* (C3F1).

A key implication of these behaviours is that there are differences in how value is experienced between active and passive use of social media. While a club aims to motivate engagement among its fans on social media, as the active users are more

likely to use social media, it would be beneficial to the club to prioritise the provision of content that creates value for them, as opposed to passive users.

#### **5.3.2.4. Respondent Usage of Social Media Platforms**

As all clubs in the NIFL use both Facebook and Twitter to communicate with fans, respondents were asked questions regarding what social media platforms they most frequently used (in relation to following their sports club). As is the trend among social media research in sport, Facebook and Twitter were the two most commonly used platform. However, there were some differences in the motives and purpose behind respondents using a particular platform, and the majority of respondents identified that they tended to use one platform more frequently than another.

Respondent C1F1 stated that he was able to gather information through the clubs social media, and that he tended to use Twitter more often than Facebook: *“Yeah, mainly through the social media platforms that they use, so I’d tend to focus on the likes of Twitter, that what I tend to be most active on....I would use Facebook to a slightly lower extent”* (C1F1). Respondent C3F3 similarly identifies that he uses Twitter for news and sport: *“I use Twitter a lot for tweeting about news articles, or sports teams, or just personal thoughts, and then Facebook would then just be to keep up with friends and family”* (C3F3). From the opinion of these respondents, it can be suggested that Twitter offers a more effective environment for provision of information.

Several other platforms were mentioned (Instagram and WhatsApp). The primary use of WhatsApp was for private messaging, and while people mentioned sharing within it, highlighted by respondents C3F1, C6F1 and C3F4, it is within a private network and not beneficial to helping understand factors impacting on this conceptual framework. WhatsApp is therefore an inappropriate platform for research in relation to the proposed conceptual framework. Similarly, Instagram was mentioned by several respondents. C1F2 used it as his primary channel for following Premier League football clubs: *“Following football on Instagram...following the other football teams I like”* (C1F2). However, it is not used by the majority of NIFL teams and therefore can be seen as another inappropriate platform for this research. Research into Instagram’s usefulness could be valuable in the future; however, with limited resources available within clubs, it is more efficient to use their existing platforms more effectively than to create new channels.

However, a key talking point in the context of this research was the identification of the Irish League Forums as ‘social media’ by several respondents. C3F2 identifies similarities between the forums and social media, describing the forum as a place where fans socialise: *“Something like Twitter, but also the Irish league forum is really good for that because the fans do get to know each other”* (C3F2). Because of the interactive nature of a platform such as an online forum, it can often be mistaken for a form of social media by fans.

It also shares a lot of similarities in terms of the value that it provides, which are also apparent on Facebook and Twitter. As in the above quote, socialising is a value that can be experienced on the forum, and in the following section is a primary value of social media. C6F1 discusses how he uses it to gather information: *“Facebook I would sort of use it for information, and the Irish League forum I would use it for information too - sometimes just pick up a bit of gossip if you’re looking to see if transfers are being made. Or else you can go on the other clubs and see sometimes they’re having as bad of a time as we are. So that cheers you up a bit”* (C6F1). C3F4 proposes that camaraderie between fans across multiple teams can be experienced: *“If something serious happens at one of the clubs – if you read someone’s died, a supporter of a club and you may have known them or not have known them and you give your thoughts and condolences – there is a bit of a camaraderie between football fans”* (C3F4). It may also offer significant advantages over social media in certain areas; C3F2 highlights that you can write more on the forum, compared to Twitter: *“The only advantage to the forum is you can write a lot more. 140 character leaves you not much wiggle room”* (C3F2).<sup>1</sup>

While some values experienced may be the same, or similar in nature the platform does not support shared content in the same manner (to a previously unaware audience, or user’s existing social network). The nature of a forum is more community-based, and private; whereas social media exists as a public forum. Therefore, while values are similar in terms of content, research into motives behind engagement cannot be sought from these forums and they therefore do not contribute significant findings to RO1.

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<sup>1</sup> Data collected prior to change of character limit on Twitter.



### **5.3.3. Fan Value in Social Media**

Values were previously identified in the literature review that encouraged engagement with social media content. These themes included symbolic value, through self-identification with the club, hedonic values, such as entertainment and passing time, functional value such as information or knowledge and social value such as discussions, ‘banter’, and competing with rival fans (Funk and James, 2006; Y. K. Kim and Trail, 2011; Abeza et al., 2013; Eagleman, 2013; Y. Kwon and Kwak, 2014; Dixon et al., 2015). While the focus of RO1 is on identifying and evaluating the key motives behind engaging with content within social networks, it is important to note that the content itself must first provide value to the fans before they will interact/engage with it. In other words fans will not engage with content that provides them with no value.

#### **5.3.3.1. Categorisation of Fan Social Media Value**

Table 5.10 shows the categories of fan social media value. These can be further sub categorised into five themes of value that fans experience through a SSC’s social media. These themes include functional value, hedonic value, symbolic value, social value and experiential value (Abeza et al., 2013, Stavros et al., 2014, Filo et al., 2015). Four of these themes were consistent with existing literature on social media’s value in sport; however, experiential value is not a theme that has been previously examined in great detail. This research would suggest that experiential value describes fans’ perceptions of how the content from a club’s social media benefitted them in a positive manner. To further expand on this, it is how fans describe their perceived experience of a club’s social media, as opposed to describing what the content offered. Experiential values identified from the data included hype, interesting, quality and timeliness.

<b>Functional</b>	<b>Hedonic</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Experiential</b>
Awareness	Behind the Scenes	Camaraderie	Banter	Hype
Competition	Entertainment	Connection	BIRGing/CORFing	Interesting
Events	Highlights	Interaction with club	Socialising	Quality
Information	Pass Time	Self-identification		Timeliness
Merchandising				
Travel Arrangements				

**Table 5.10 – Categories of value in social media.**

Functional values that were identified included fans being made aware of content, being able to participate in competitions, receive information about events and the club itself, learn about merchandise, and to organise travel to and from matches. Hedonic values, associated with positive feelings or pleasure, included behind the scenes content, entertaining content, match highlights, and using social media to pass time. Symbolic values were those associated with the fan's image. These included camaraderie between fans, developing a connection with the club, interacting with the club, and developing a sense of self-identification with the club. Social values identified included banter among supporters, BIRGing and CORFing based on match results, and the facilitation of socialising online. Experiential values were feelings that fans experienced from social media use, and described the emotional reaction based on particular content an individual may have. These included, hype, interest, quality content, and timeliness of posts.

#### **5.3.3.2. Experiential Social Media Value for Fans**

C3F2 expresses links between hype and building of atmosphere: *"I always knew I was going to go to that match – but it helped kind of build that atmosphere because I know Tiernan's actual family showed up to that match because of the atmosphere. Horrible result. 4-0 down at half time, absolute nightmare of a match but at least it showed kind*

*of the power that social media does actually have – and the sway it has. Because the buzz around the C3 for a couple of years there when they were winning titles and stuff was just incredible” C3F2.* It can be suggested that experiential value can also bring an element of the offline match day experience to an online setting, which gives a clearer indication of value proposition for potential consumers of the SSC. The quote identifies that social media has been used to build atmosphere around an upcoming match, and that it generates a ‘buzz’. The respondent also adds that social media has power to do this, and provides evidence of a friend’s family attending a match (impact on consumption behaviour) due to the hype surrounding the event, communicated via social media.

Similarly, respondent C3F5 shows that social media is used by the club to generate an atmosphere and desire to attend matches: *“Their social media is quite gripping of what I’ve seen of getting people down to watch you know, letting our – giving our stance on the table and saying “...this is gonna be a real big match” (C3F5).* This is also facilitated through the use of alternative social media platforms (WhatsApp) in a more direct approach. For C3F5, hype includes rallying up fans, and an emphasis on the importance of a particular match. Both of these respondents suggest that an impact on attendance is a result of generating hype on social media. Hype can also be seen to be a perception; what one of the respondents could describe as buzz, or gripping may not be the same to another fan, and is therefore subjective value. Additionally, describing content as “interesting” will be subjective. C6F2 identifies that interesting content is better: *“I suppose it would have to be interesting – I would follow other football teams on Facebook, like in the Premier League like Spurs and stuff and obviously their FB would be a lot better than an Irish League team.” (C6F2).* It is possible for social media to be used certain ways to increase the likelihood of hype being perceived, but this has significant practical implications that are beyond the scope of this research.

Another experiential factor that is pertinent to social media is the value of timeliness. Timeliness is the code used to describe value perceived when social media was updated frequently and within good time (regarding information-based content). A quote below from respondent C3F4 identifies how timeliness is achieved through social media. The respondent uses social media to view highlights of other matches during the match he is attending, suggesting that due to the quick nature of the provision of these highlights, he perceives a benefit. It also links to an inherent value

of social media as a marketing communications platform: quick provision of information to the target audience. The respondent recognises this as value, which can be attributed to advancements in technology: *“...you can actually be at the C3 match and half time I get to look at the goals in the other games at half time which is something new this season. You’d never have got it that quickly so that’s pretty good”* (C3F4).

This also indicates that timeliness has links to other forms of value. In other words, it is unlikely that timeliness is a value that will be perceived if not associated with another form of content that provides the user with value. If information is provided on social media that provides no value to the fan, it will not matter how quickly, or within good time it is; no value of a timely nature will be experienced. This further develops an understanding of what experiential value is; it can be suggested that no form of experiential value can be achieved if it not associated with another form of value in social media content: experiential value cannot be perceived alone, it must be a counterpart to another form of value.

Another factor of social media value involving timeliness is the preference it can cause for use of a particular platform. Respondent C7F2 identified that he preferred to use Twitter to receive information due to the frequency of which it updated: *“I’m not really as big on Facebook...I just prefer Twitter, it’s easier to use. Like pages aren’t kept up to date as much as Twitter – so I stay on Twitter most of the time”* (C7F2). Similarly, below, respondent C1F1 identified that quality of content made him prefer Facebook over Twitter. The perceived quality of social media content on Facebook may be greater due to the level of detail that can be obtained, due to posts on Twitter being limited to 140 characters. The implications are that preferences within fans may dictate a platform to which they prefer, and particular forms of experiential value (quality and timeliness) may be inherently easier to achieve due to the nature of the social media platform where the content is available. C1F1 also identifies that he is willing to trade off on a particular value, timeliness, for improved quality, showing that not all forms of value are of equal importance to fans, again reinforcing the idea that experiential value is subjective, and individually determined: *“I think the content they post on Facebook is more, interesting for me, so I think they don’t post as much there but what they do post tends to be higher quality”* (C1F1).

Experiential value may have a significant practical implication on club marketing communications, as it does not tell the club what specific content to provide, but how it should be delivered and perceived. Therefore, it is more difficult to implement, as it is based on consumer perceptions as opposed to categories of content. It is more difficult to provide something that is going to create a perception of hype, timeliness or interest in someone as part of a systematic process, as personal tastes significantly differ, as opposed to offering people competitions, highlights or information (categories of content).

#### **5.3.4. Motivation for Engagement**

The primary focus of RO1 was to identify the motives behind fans engaging with club content on social media. It was important to understand the level of loyalty of fans, how they used social media, and their primary sources of value before doing this, so that findings could be interpreted with reference to these factors. Engagement can be seen as a value received through using social media, this research aimed to identify the primary motivations to engage in such behaviour on social media.

##### **5.3.4.1. Achievement as a Motivating Factor**

Achievement motivates engagement, due to emotional attachments to the club, as highlighted by C3F3: *“If Celtic beat Rangers 5-1 I probably would share that”* (C3F3). This can be seen as an expression of self-identity, as the fan may want to be associated with success. C3F3 identifies Celtic as the team he is most passionate about, and while this is not a SSC, within the semi-professional context, it will result in the same value being experienced; self-identification with the club and its successes. In other words, if C3F3 felt the same level of emotional attachment to a NIFL team, he would be motivated to engage with their content if it was related to a ‘big result’, and similarly would experience the same value he does when he shares Celtic’s content. Similarly, C7F2 also enjoys this vicarious achievement over rivals, and identifies that engaging with content facilitates banter and social interaction (values) with other fans: *“Then obviously if you get a big win over a rival it’s good to wind other fans up – things like that”* (C7F2). Similarly, C2F2 supports this by identifying that banter leads to contrasting viewpoints being shared: *“Banter over social media can be entertaining to say the least. Usually it’s good to see contrasting viewpoints – you get to see*

*different opinions on a game and what each group of supporters are interested in.”* (C2F2). As is shown in existing literature, more loyal fans are more likely to experience value through self-identification with the club. Therefore, the example of C3F3 using shared content to experience vicarious achievement is unlikely in the context of a SSC as he is only classed as a Casual Follower. On the other hand, C7F2 is a Fan of a NIFL team, and shows that his value through sharing results in further social values, of BIRGing/CORFing and banter. Thus, it can be said that while achievement motivates the initial engagement with club content, this results in multiple forms of experienced value in itself. Consequently, it can be said that engaging itself is not value, but facilitates value being experienced in multiple ways; engagement leads to extended value being experienced through social media.

#### **5.3.4.2. Altruistic Motivations for Engagement**

A key motivation discussed by two respondents C3F1 and C3F5 was of an altruistic nature; the respondents identified that their primary motivation for engaging with certain forms of club content was to help others. Through this, a commonly discussed term C3F1, C8F1 and C3F5, awareness, arose as a key motivator of engaging with content within one’s social network:

*“I wouldn’t share things on Facebook for like getting a like or anything, it’s just kind of to be helpful.”* (C3F1)

*“I like and share it, especially if I think it can help promote the club...if I can sort of put the club into people’s mind-sets, especially maybe people that don’t usually look at C8 football club, or any information about it”* (C8F1).

*“Yeah, yeah it is to raise awareness”* (C8F1).

*“If I was that passionate about an event or I knew people that would enjoy it, I’d be sharing it, I would be tagging people going “get in get on this like you need to hit this up.”* (C3F5)

As the individuals would have already been aware of the content, a willingness to share it in order to create awareness in others shows the impact of behavioural loyalty on fans. The key implication of this finding is that fans are actively willing to share content to increase awareness among their networks of social media content. Therefore

it is viable that clubs can aim to utilise this loyalty (and associated behaviour) in order to co-create value on social media. C3F1 spoke about sharing information to be helpful to others in their network, whereas C8F1 wished to raise awareness of C8 among his social network. C3F5 directly stated that he was wanting to encourage attendance at matches. He also linked this to experiential value, through generating hype on social media around an event or a match. This again would lead to co-created value (both club and spectators would benefit).

#### **5.3.4.3. Functional Value Motivating Engagement**

Multiple respondents identified that they would commonly see and be motivated to engage in sharing club content that was a competition, or provided information. These motives to engage centred on functional value (as discussed in the previous section). Competitions would suggest incentivised engagement on social media, C3F5 explains that he is motivated to share this content, and indicates that he doesn't see negatives associated with it: *"There's nothing more appealing where they do a competition say – share this here and you're in a chance to a free C3 top. And that just circulates around Facebook you think "ah what the hell sure I may as well share it"* (C3F5). C1F1 also discussed his motives for sharing, being to win tickets or merchandise, so tangible value could be realised through this. Information also has a primary function: *"If it was a giveaway for, I dunno, merchandise, I think - ticketing I would follow, I would share for that"* (C1F1). C3F1 states sharing information regarding tickets and away matches (travel information) to her network in order to keep people aware: *"It's maybe important about tickets – or it's maybe important about an away ground, what way you have to enter an away ground, and something happened or something's kind of changed. So I would share things that way that would let people know in terms of the football"* (C3F1). This again highlights the links to altruism and raising awareness.

#### **5.3.4.4. Entertainment and Humour as Motivation for Engagement**

Two frequent, and closely related motives that six respondents identified were entertainment and humour. Respondent C3F2 identifies that a motivation to retweet content is because he finds it humorous: *"Would I retweet? Yeah I would if I see something that's absolutely hilarious"* (C3F2). The way in which he answers the question suggests that often little prior thought is put into engaging with content that

is humorous. What can be taken from this is that there may not need to be a strong attachment to the source of social media content in order for consumers to share content that is entertaining or humorous, which will have implications at a practical level in SSCs and a theoretical level (implications for the model). While the model identifies that highly loyal fans are more likely to engage with content, if the content is humorous, individuals who are less allegiant or attached may also share the content within their networks. In a comparable manner, C2F1 acknowledges that social media is centred on entertainment and fun: *“I feel like you can be too serious on social media then it can portray a negative image of oneself because it’s supposed to be all about entertainment and fun you know?”* (C2F1). These two characteristics are associated with spontaneity, further supporting the idea that entertainment and humour is shared without strong attachments to the club.

#### **5.3.4.5. The Impact of Personal Image on Engagement**

Personal image serves as both a motive and barrier to engaging with content. The motive of personal image describes occasions where fans engaged with content to create a positive perception of themselves in the opinion of others. This theme of motivation has close ties with symbolic value, as one’s self identity or appearance is the key motivation to engage. As C1F1 highlights, sharing information about an event can make the person engaging appear intelligent or knowledgeable and would have increased social status because of it: *“On a social level if you’re perceived to have knowledge over sharing an event it can look quite good in your favour or appearance.”* (C1F1). On a more basic level, C7F1 highlights that his motivation to engage comes from whether or not the content represents his opinion: *“If it relates to me – and would be something I would say or want to post really”* C7F1. This factor can also become a barrier to engaging with content, with a potential issue identified by C3F2, that negative connotations can be perceived by others if certain content is shared: *“Because I take my Twitter quite personal now, so if I see someone who’s retweeting that I’m like “you’re an idiot”. So I don’t want someone to be like “C3F2’s an idiot” – that”* (C3F2). In other words, once an individual engages with content on social media, it can be seen as their opinion, and therefore can negatively impact on the perception others have of them.



#### **5.3.4.6. Impact of Personal Interest on Engagement**

A key motivation for people in engaging with content was the level of interest they had in the content itself. C2F1 discusses that he focuses on engaging with content that is relevant to the teams he follows directly, implying those he is most attached to: *“Yeah to me it’s about the teams I follow direct directly. That would be the content I would share. Also the other thing that would encourage me is perhaps former players now playing for another team that you became interested in, and you thought they were a great player - you would still have your following of those individuals”* (C2F1). He also reveals that he still has an interest (and potential attachment) to players previously at his supported club. Respondents also linked their interest with others in their network, and as such this motivation can be seen as a way to provide their contacts, who share the same interests, with some form of value. C6F1 identifies that his connections will most likely be reading the same content he is: *Usually they’re probably looking at the same stuff I’m looking at, but sometimes I may throw our attention to someone - you might see someone on the BBC website, or you might see something on another website about a player that used to play for C6 and send them a link to it”* (C6F1). Furthermore, C6F1 identifies that on occasion he will share something with them because he has an interest in it, and consequently they most likely will too.

#### **5.4. Categorising Motives for Engagement**

As is the case with values experienced on social media, it is also possible to categorise the common motives for engaging with social media content. While originally from the data, altruism was seen to be an individual motive for engaging with content, in reality it exists as a category. This data shows that there are primary motives to engaging with content on social media, with both secondary and tertiary factors influencing the decision to engage with content. The primary motives are self-interest, altruism, and cooperative (shown in table 5.11). Secondary factors encourage and increase the likelihood of engaging with content, but may not be necessary to do so. These are individual perceptions of content (and may not be something that is easily controlled or provided by the club in a systemic approach). The secondary factors include engaging content, hype, originality, positivity and shock. Tertiary factors

influencing the decision to engage are external to the social media content, and include social media platform and typical social media behaviour.

Self-interest	Cooperative	Altruistic
Achievement	Banter (Social)	Entertainment
Personal Image	Personal Interest	Humour
Competition		Information
		Awareness

**Table 5.11 – Primary Motives to Engage with Social Media Content.**

#### **5.4.1. Primary Motives**

Primary motives are those which centre on making the decision whether or not to engage with social media content. Some fans were motivated to engage based on self-interest, had a focus on their connections through altruistic motivations, or wished to engage in social behaviour through cooperative motives.

##### **5.4.1.1. Self-Interest as a Motive for Engagement**

Those individuals who were motivated by self-interest included motives such as achievement, and personal image as the key factors in their decision whether or not to engage with a club's content. Through engaging with content of a club's achievement, they were experiencing vicarious success, which primarily benefitted themselves. C3F3 provides an example of achievement, sharing content when his supported team has a positive result: *"If it was like maybe a big result; or, I think it's a lot easier on Twitter to retweet something rather than to share something on Facebook"* (C3F3). Similarly, those who prioritised their personal image on social media also had self-interest as their primary motive to engage with content. C3F2 discusses that his decision to engage with content on social media is his own, and disregards the opinion of others in certain instances when doing so: *"I might have followers on Twitter and they're like "aww Jesus he's retweeting about sport again" but it's my personal decision because it's my Twitter"* (C3F2). Fans who shared content focused on winning competitions also fall into this category for primary motivation, as the competition may have a tangible benefit to it, which the individual will experience.

There is also less likelihood of prioritising others in the decision to engage with this form of content. Again, C1F1 provides a clear example of this, discussing the incentive of sharing the content: *“I mean, there’s always the physical incentives as well like the tickets or the merchandise if that’s what they’re sharing for”* (C1F1). Through entering competitions, there is a chance for personal gain.

#### **5.4.1.2. Altruism as a Motive for Engagement**

As discussed earlier in the section, altruistic motives exist for fans to engage with content; they prioritise the needs and opinions of others in their decision-making process. This was initially identified as a singular motive; however, it makes more sense for altruism to exist as a category containing sub-themes of motivation. Within altruism, fans are motivated to engage with content that is entertaining or humorous, they may also share information for the benefit of others and may intend to raise awareness. C3F1 links both a clear intention for prioritising others, “spreading the word”, and humour: *“About spreading the word around about different things – or maybe somebody’s posted something that’s funny that’s happened at the match or something”* (C3F1). Likewise, C3F5 identifies that his sharing is positive for other people, who will indirectly see the content: *“It’s also good for anyone who is work or is in sport, or whatever - who can’t make it – “oh there’s the result” indirectly – I’m not aiming it at them but they’re seeing it”* (C3F5). C4F1 and C4F2 discuss a desire to raise awareness and interest among their social network through sharing club content on social media:

*“If there was something on at our club I would share it with my Facebook so my Facebook friends would see it”* (C4F1).

*“I would share it too, but I probably would share most of the time...just not sure what the answer is...to build actual support through social media”* (C4F2).

This provides further evidence for the existence of altruism as a primary motive for engagement. These supporters prioritise others in their decision to engage with content.

#### 5.4.1.3. Cooperative Motives for Engagement

Cooperative motives involve aspects of both self-interest and an altruistic nature. They require both the individual and an outside source in order for value to be experienced through the shared content. In many ways they involve social values experienced through social media. Banter was identified as a motive for fans to engage with content, and it fits into this category. In order for the full value to be experienced of banter between fans, interaction between said fans needs to occur. Therefore engagement of content for this purpose can be seen as a catalyst to experiencing this form of value. C7F2 provides two examples of this through discussing banter through “winding up” rival fans after a victory, and also through getting other fans to “bite” on a funny story:

*“Then obviously if you get a big win over a rival it’s good to wind other fans up – things like that” (C7F2)*

*“If it interests me I think other people will be interested – or I’m forcing people into biting on some funny story” (C7F2).*

Another way in which this exhibits itself is through the code of personal interest. While this motivation to engage was because an individual had an interest in the content, there was a second purpose, to elicit a response, or provide some interesting content to their network. C3F5 provides an insight into this behaviour, through identifying that he has a passion for a particular topic, and shares it to get other people involved: *“If I was that passionate about an event or I knew people that would enjoy it, I’d be sharing it, I would be tagging people going “get in get on this like you need to hit this up” (C3F5).* He also identifies that there is greater value in this behaviour for him, because he wants to develop other people’s interest in what he has an interest in: *“So that share is harmless – and I know I share it because I’m passionate and all but, I think I just want everyone to share the passion with me not just to me – but I want other people to be involved with this. So you know that’s why I would kind of share their updates as well” (C3F5).* Therefore, engaging with content for this purpose can be seen to be cooperative.

#### 5.4.2. Secondary Motives

Secondary factors do not make the decision to engage, but rather encourage, or discourage it if they are absent. These are closely related to the experiential values on social media, and are an individual's perceptions regarding the club's content on social media. They are often descriptive phrases – interesting, unique, shocking, positive, and describe the attributes of the content but not the true motivation to engage. They are similar to the values experienced as a fan from social media, and show a link between fan value experienced and motivation to engage.

C7F2 identifies several secondary factors for engaging with content, including it being engaging, original and fun: *“If it's interesting – if it's engaging towards fans that would be the main thing. If it's not like the same generic stuff they put out all the time – if it's something like unique, and it's like fun. That's what you're gonna - you share stuff like that – if it catches the eye where like, even with Twitter I find myself scrolling through stuff really quickly and if nothing catches my eye then I don't really read it – so it's like originality really, that would be my answer”* (C7F2). He earlier states that he shares because of his personal interest, and links this to beginning discussion between fans. Therefore, his primary motive to engage is cooperative, as it involves both himself and another connection for value to be experienced (through socialising). C2F1 highlights that if something is shocking, it makes a fan more likely to engage because he wants his connections to know about it, and experiences potential excitement: *“Really, it's the shock factor to it that makes you want to share because you want other people to know about it because it is exciting and it is something which is different to the expectation really”* (C2F1). C2F1 here shows that while his secondary factors to engage is the shock factor, he primarily focuses on altruistic engagement as a primary motive, citing that his purpose is to raise awareness in others. C5F2 identifies the he engages with exciting content from C5 as a photo of a player: *“If there was an exciting photo of a player that had just signed for the club – I don't know. I think that's mainly the thing with social media that people are looking for.”* (C5F2). However, C5F1 does not associate C5's social media content with excitement and states that C5 could improve on levels of excitement: *“I think they need to be a bit more exciting in their social media activity”* (C5F1). C3F5 is motivated to engage because of positivity, and focuses on other people's perceptions of what he shares,

where again altruism is the primary motive to engage: *“I think I like to keep it as positive as I can. Maybe make the user think that the...obviously positive things why would anyone not want to read that?”* (C3F5). These three examples show how secondary factors are related to primary motive; while they encourage engagement of social media content, they are not the primary purpose for doing so.

#### **5.4.3. Tertiary Motives**

Two tertiary factors influencing the decision to engage with content on social media were identified from the data. These factors were the social media platform itself, and the user's typical social media behaviour (active/passive). Similar to the secondary factors, these had an impact on the decision to engage or not, but were not the key motive behind doing so. While secondary factors described the perception of social media content, tertiary factors exist externally to the content, and are closer related to the social media platform and user. C3F2 discusses the ease of use when it comes to sharing content on Twitter, and identifies that it means he shares more content on this platform: *“But Facebook not as much because it's just so much easier to hit retweet onto your Twitter and it'll just go onto your feed”* (C3F2). Therefore, this is a factor that must come into decision making regarding whether or not to engage with a club's content on social media. The second quote below from C2F1 discusses how his behaviour on social media changed, and as a result he began to engage with content less often: *“I went through a period of where I would share more serious content and give my opinion on things and it was negatively thought upon - it was frowned upon amongst some other Facebook users, which made me become quite hesitant to actually post to Facebook for a period of time or share content”* (C2F1). This shows that individuals are still influenced by their typical behaviour on social media; due to negative reactions to active use, he changed to a more passive behaviour. Any time the decision to engage with content would have arisen, this would have been an influencing factor in the decision-making process.

#### **5.5. Relationship between Fan Classification and Engagement**

A key finding of this research has been that existing fan loyalty does not have a direct impact on engagement with social media content. All fans interviewed discussed having reason to interact or engage with content, while all being from various fan

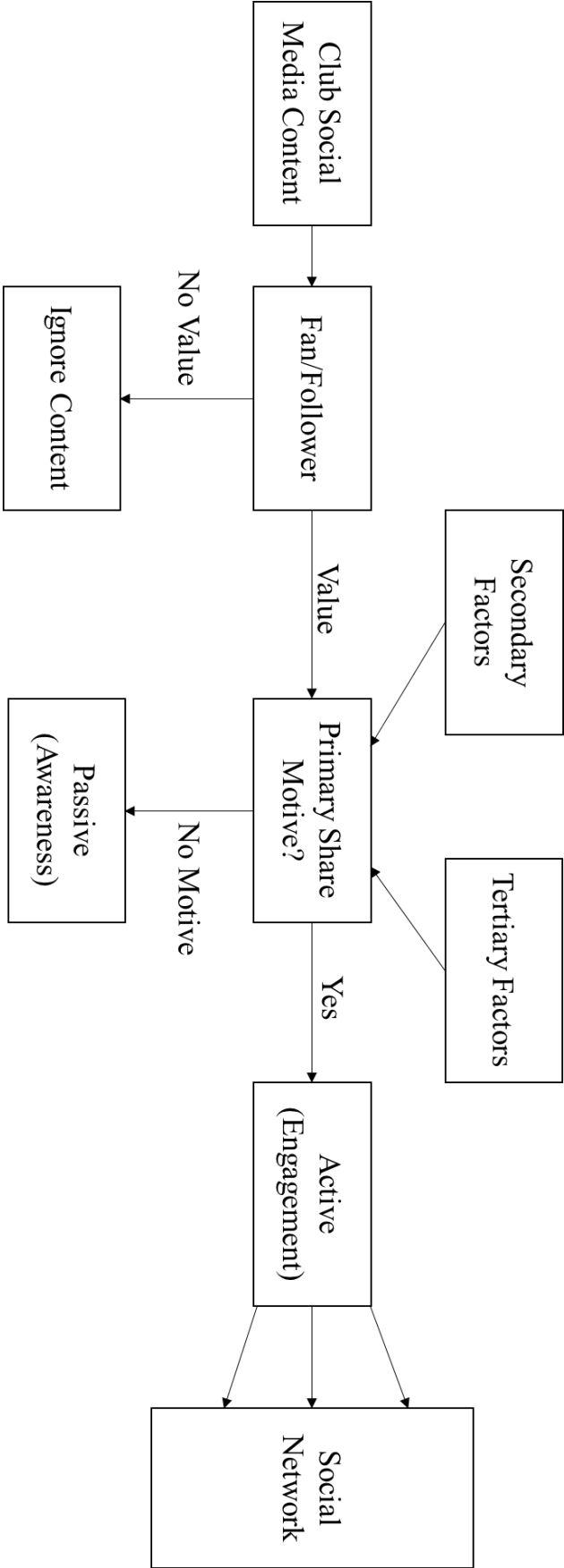
segments. As was identified through the literature review, and depicted by the conceptual model, it was anticipated that those exhibiting the highest levels of loyalty would be more likely to engage. There was also no single motive that individuals identified that was universal in the decision to engage with social media content. While this is an interesting finding, further research could look at this phenomena in sport across a representative sample through employing quantitative research methods and analysis. Additionally, future research could look to measure the importance of each form of motive and its impact in motivating engagement on social media.

## **5.6. Fan Decision Making Process for Engagement with Social Media Content**

Figure 6.2 shows the decision making process for fans engaging with club content on social media in semi-professional sport. The model shows the process of club content reaching a fan on social media, if value is experienced the fan either enters into passive or active behaviour. Passively the fan may read the content and not engage. Alternatively, the fan engages because a primary motive to do so has been experienced. Secondary and tertiary factors have an impact at this stage. The content is then shared into the fan's social network. This model explains the action, and answers RO1, showing where key motives that have been identified come into play in the proposed action of engaging with content on social media.

To summarise, the decision to engage is made because of the primary motive, but can be encouraged/discouraged by the presence or absence of secondary and tertiary factors. RO1 focused on identifying the key motivations behind fans engaging with content on social media. The results show that fans enter a decision-making process based on a primary motive to engage with content (self-interest, cooperative or altruistic), which is influenced by secondary factors (certain perceived values through social media) and tertiary factors (social media platform, typical social media behaviour).

**Figure 5.2 - Decision Making Process to Engage with Social Media Content in SSC Fandom**





## 5.7. Overview of Key Findings from Research Stage One

The key findings relating to research stage one (which address RO1) were identified in this chapter. Respondents from all categories of fan loyalty were likely to, or discussed engaging with SSC social media content. No segment appeared more likely to than others. Additionally, fans had typical social media behaviours. Fans use social media passively or actively, but could move from one category to the other temporarily. This research identified five categories of fan social media value: functional, hedonic, symbolic, social, and experiential.

Fan decisions to engage with social media content were not solely based on experiencing value. A process by which the decision to engage was identified which included primary, secondary, and tertiary motives. Primary motives to engage with social media content were identified. These were the intent and purpose behind the conscious engagement decision, and included: self-interest, cooperative, and altruistic. Secondary motives were factors which encouraged or discouraged the decision to engage. There were phrases used to describe the social media content that was being shared, and can be linked with experiential value. Identified secondary motives were: interesting, unique, shocking, and positive. Tertiary motives also mediated the decision to engage with social media content but were not the key motivation behind it. Two tertiary motives were identified: social media platform, and typical social media behaviour. The analysis of data from stage one of the research led to the development of a model illustrating the decision making process of engagement from fans with SSC social media content (Figure 5.2).

Key Findings from Fan Interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No link existed between behavioural loyalty and likelihood of engagement – all respondents discussed engaging with social media content.</li><li>• Five categories of fan social media value were identified: functional, hedonic, symbolic, social, and experiential.</li><li>• A process for engagement with social media content was identified and illustrated in figure 5.2.</li><li>• Primary motives for engagement were: altruism, self-interest, or cooperative.</li></ul>

- Secondary motives (experiential value) and tertiary factors (social media platform and behaviour) mediated the decision to engage.
- Social media value on its own did not lead to fan engagement with social media content.

**Table 5.12 – Overview of Key Findings from Fan Interviews.**

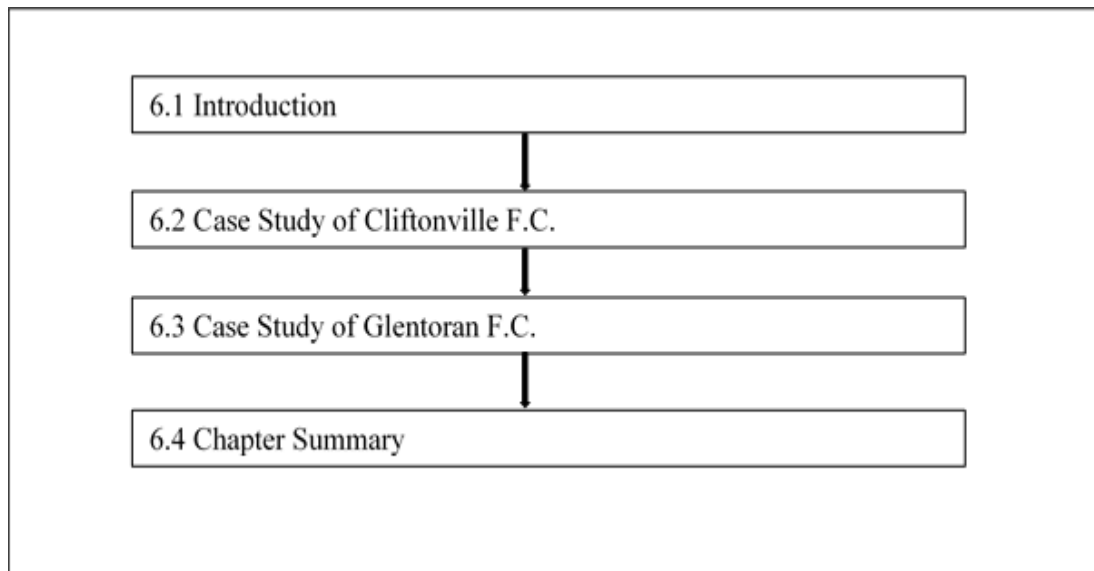
## **5.8. Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented an analysis of the findings from stage one of the empirical study. It focused on analysing the interviews from fans of SSCs in relation to their values experienced through social media use. It also identified three categories of motivation for fans to engage with club social media content. This lead to the development of a model presenting the decision making process regarding engagement with SSC social media content. In the following chapter analysis of findings regarding stage two of the empirical study will be discussed and analysed.

## **6.0. CHAPTER SIX: Findings**

### **6.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the empirical research. This will be reported in case format, whereby each case will contain findings from both fans and club representatives. Direct quotations are referred to throughout and presented in Tables (6.1 – 6.17) across each case. Fan interviews relating to RO1 and RO3 are presented under several headings, consistent across cases. Club interviews relating to RO2 and RO3 were also presented in this manner to allow for cross-case comparisons to be drawn in chapter seven. Two cases are presented in this chapter. The remaining six cases can be found in the appendices. The structure of this chapter is presented in figure 6.1.



**Figure 6.1 – Findings Chapter Structure**

### **6.2. Case Study of C3**

The case study of C3 had five fan interviews which provided a wider range of views regarding value experienced on social media from one club. The club itself also created a new social media account with the purpose of engaging fans. C3 was case three of eight, and referred to as C3.

### 6.2.1. Stage One: Fan Interviews

This section presents the findings from fan interviews conducted to meet RO1 and RO3. In total, five in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with C3 fans.

#### 6.2.1.1. Fan Classification

The five C3 fans interviewed represented different categories of consumer loyalty. C3F1 and C3F4 were both identified to be Committed Supporters of the club. They are both season ticket holders of the club, with C3F1 stated that she only misses 2 games per season, and C3F4 missed several of the away matches due to travel arrangements. Both of these individuals identify that they are involved with the club: C3F1 volunteers at the club, and C3F4 helps raise money at fundraising events. C3F2 and C3F5 both lie currently within the Social Devotee category based on their current attendance levels at matches. They both identified that in the past they were more active attendees of matches, but due to other commitments they cannot attend as regularly. This is consistent among many respondents interviewed as fans of clubs. Again, it shows the ability for consumption levels to change over time. C3F3 identified as a casual follower of the club, and has only recently developed an interest in following the club. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.1.

Topic	Evidence
<b>Fan Classification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“I don’t miss a match now. The past since...2013 season I’ve probably missed max two matches a season that includes friendlies. I mean this year from when we started pre-season friendlies at the end of June I’ve only missed one match and that was a friendly against Larne.” (C3F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“As often as I possibly can. Obviously during the week I can’t because of work but if I get the opportunity at the weekend, I would try and get there – try and get to the home games.” (C3F2)</i></li><li>• <i>“I mean I wasn’t interested before this module and now it’s one of those things where if you give it ago you’d be pleasantly surprised; so I was pleasantly surprised whenever we went to three C3 games, I just really surprised how good football actually was” (C3F3).</i></li><li>• <i>“I’ve been to most games this season...I’ve been up in Coleraine there – I normally don’t go up to Coleraine matches but they’re doing well – they’re nothing special but</i></li></ul>

	<p><i>they're doing alright. Big match this coming Monday against C4 so it's a top of the league battle."</i> (C3F4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"I've been described as a part timer to be honest, I've only really been to around 3 or 4 matches the past year."</i> (C3F5)</li> </ul>
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**Table 6.1 – Quotations related to Fan Classification in C3**

The quotations relating to fan classification identify the existence of multiple categories of fan within SSCs. Additionally, they highlight the behavioural loyalty of supporters and how this can be used to categorise fans into different segments.

#### **6.2.1.2. Social Media Behaviour**

When discussing personal social media use, C3F1 identifies that she more commonly uses Facebook; however, she uses Twitter to keep up to date with C3 and sport. Many respondents linked Twitter with up-to-date information and news across all clubs. C3F1 also fits into the category of an active social media user. Similarly, C3F2 said that information regarding C3 is more commonly found on Twitter as opposed to Facebook, highlighting that the social media platform may have limitations on how value can be experienced by fans. C3F2 also fits into the category of active user, when discussing some of the ways he engages with content and contributes content to social media. He is one of several fans who identify that Irish League Forums exist online and are a source of fan to fan interaction. C3F4 identifies that he is not a massive user of social media, but only signed up to follow the results of C3 while travelling. C3F3 and C3F5 are both active users of social media, with C3F3 highlighting that he uses Twitter more actively than Facebook. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.2.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
<b>Social Media Behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"I mean I have Facebook, I have Twitter. Twitter I don't overly use too much – I'd use it to keep up to date with C3 and the other Irish league kind of stuff, but I wouldn't be tweeting every single day of the week. Facebook I would use a lot more regularly."</i> (C3F1)</li> <li>• <i>"With Facebook I don't write statuses – I would get more of my information about football – especially football, and especially Irish league from Twitter rather than Facebook."</i> (C3F2)</li> <li>• <i>"Something like Twitter, but also the Irish league forum is really good for that because the fans do get to know each other."</i> (C3F2)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The only advantage to the forum is you can write a lot more. 140 character leaves you not much wiggle room.” (C3F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Why does anyone use social media? To keep up to date with football.” (C3F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I use Twitter a lot for tweeting about news articles, or sports teams, or just personal thoughts, and then Facebook would then just be to keep up with friends and family.” (C3F3)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table 6.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Behaviour in C3**

Respondents interviewed identified their preferred social media platforms, and gave reasons supporting this. This illustrates the importance of SSCs managing multiple channels to satisfy their fans.

#### **6.2.1.3. Social Media Value**

C3F4 identifies that camaraderie between supporters of clubs can be a way value is experienced through social media. While giving the example of something serious happening, there are other instances where supporters can experience this type of value. He also said that one of the ways he can experience further value through social media is goal highlights, which is linked to being available quickly, a recurrent theme identified by several respondents as value relating to social media. C3F5 said that banter between fans is a way to experience value, and the social media can be used to generate attendances. These both relate to social values and C3F2 supports this as value, by identifying the fact that he enjoys opposition fans getting annoyed. C3F1 and C3F3 both discuss information and being made aware of this as key values for them on social media. C3F3 identifies fixture change, news and goal information as key sources of value, while C3F1 said that she uses social media to find out team news and ticket information. C3F1 also identifies that C3 do not interact with fans much via social media, highlighting a potential limitation of value for the club if many of the fans desire this. It is possible that this is not something mentioned by the fans in these interviews as value because they have not yet had the chance to experience it. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.3.

Topic	Evidence
<b>Social Media Value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“If something serious happens at one of the clubs – if you read someone’s died, a supporter of a club and you may have known them or not have known them and you give your thoughts and condolences – there is a bit of a camaraderie between football fans.” (C3F4)</i></li> <li>• <i>“...you can actually be at the C3 match and half time I get to look at the goals in the other games at half time which is something new this season. You’d never have got it that quickly so that’s pretty good.” (C3F4)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Their social media is quite gripping of what I’ve seen of getting people down to watch you know, letting our – giving our stance on the table and saying “...this is gonna be a real big match”.” C3F5</i></li> <li>• <i>If you’re in that circle of supporting Man United, every Saturday, Sunday your friends are tagging you underneath Man United result updates – even the opposing Liverpool fans, they’ll tag you even if United get beat, it’s all friendly banter. (C3F5)</i></li> <li>• <i>Just helpful things that you wouldn’t get unless you maybe would have to go to the website to find. The website isn’t updated regularly or as quick – like fixture changes; team news; general news; goals; yeah – just like injury updates and competitions and stuff like that. (C3F3)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Because you want to keep yourself informed.” (C3F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think a really good thing because you get – the heat of the moment and all that when you’re at matches. But social media’s a good hub to kind of reach out and meet fans from the other clubs.” (C3F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Any football fan who says they don’t get kicks out of the opposition fans kicking up about a decision that’s went against them is a liar.” (C3F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“On Twitter – normally on the way to the match, an hour before the match the teams are always announced.” (C3F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“They don’t overly post much more than that, it’s just normally links to whatever’s up on the website and just keeping live updates in terms of tickets selling out, or issues with parking at an away ground and things like that, so...they wouldn’t overly use social media. You know, there’s not a real interaction between C3 and the fans on social media. On Facebook it’s just kind of an update.” (C3F1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table 6.3 – Quotations related to Fan Social Media Value in C3**

The respondents interviewed identified multiple forms of value they experienced from social media use. This included social value, receiving information and being able to experience camaraderie between supporters.

#### 6.2.1.4. Motives to Engage

C3F1 identifies that a key motive for her engaging with content is to make other people aware of the information, with the intent of being helpful. This shows that fans themselves are aware of how information they engage and interact with can filter through to their social networks. This indicates that fans who wish to help the club would actively engage with content if they knew it had a positive impact on their marketing communications. C3F2 said that he engages with content that is entertaining or humorous. He identifies that there can be negative consequences of engaging with certain content on social media and it having an impact on his personal image. He also notes that the platform can have an impact on engaging with content, stating that it is easier to engage on Twitter. Similarly, C3F3 supports this idea of social media platform having an impact. Additionally, he identifies that social media content which provides value relating to self-identification can motivate engagement, in this instance a large win over a rival. C3F5 discussed how he engages with content he is passionate about, showing further links between allegiance to a club and higher likelihood of engagement. Like C3F1, he also will engage if he believes there is a positive impact for his social network to be gained from the content. C3F5 is another individual who is motivated to engage based on competitions, or personal gain from social media. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.4.

Topic	Evidence
<b>Motives to Engage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“If I’ve just happened to be on my news feed and something’s came up about C3, about tickets or about something and it’s just happened there and then, I’ll share it and you’ll find a lot of the other C3 ones will share it so basically it’s going to appear.” (C3F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I wouldn’t share things on Facebook for like getting a like or anything, it’s just kind of to be helpful.” (C3F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“It’s maybe important about tickets – or its maybe important about an away ground, what way you have to enter an away ground, and something happened or something’s kind of changed. So I would share things that way that would let people know in terms of the football.” (C3F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“About spreading the word around about different things – or maybe somebody’s posted something that’s funny that’s happened at the match or something.” (C3F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Would I retweet? Yeah I would if I see something that’s absolutely hilarious.” (C3F2)</i></li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Because I take my Twitter quite personal now, so if I see someone who’s retweeting that I’m like “you’re an idiot”. So I don’t want someone to be like “C3F2’s an idiot” – that.” (C3F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I might have followers on Twitter and they’re like “aww Jesus he’s retweeting about sport again” but it’s my personal decision because it’s my Twitter.” (C3F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“But Facebook not as much because it’s just so much easier to hit retweet onto your Twitter and it’ll just go onto your feed.” (C3F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If Celtic beat Rangers 5-1 I probably would share that.” (C3F3)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If it was like maybe a big result; or, I think it’s a lot easier on Twitter to retweet something rather than to share something on Facebook.” (C3F3)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If I was that passionate about an event or I knew people that would enjoy it, I’d be sharing it, I would be tagging people going “get in get on this like you need to hit this up”. ” (C3F5)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I feel that sometimes a share on Facebook, a bit of hype on Facebook can be a very good thing for the club, for people to go down and see, “oh what is C3F5 talking about, why is he sharing that?” and you know you maybe get into people’s heads.” (C3F5)</i></li> <li>• <i>“There’s nothing more appealing where they do a competition say – share this here and you’re in a chance to a free C3 top. And that just circulates around Facebook you think “ah what the hell sure I may as well share it”. ” (C3F5)</i></li> <li>• <i>“It’s also good for anyone who is work or is in sport, or whatever - who can’t make it – “oh there’s the result” indirectly – I’m not aiming it at them but they’re seeing it.” (C3F5)</i></li> <li>• <i>“So that share is harmless – and I know I share it because I’m passionate and all but, I think I just want everyone to share the passion with me not just to me – but I want other people to be involved with this. So you know that’s why I would kind of share their updates as well.” (C3F5)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think I like to keep it as positive as I can. Maybe make the user think that the...obviously positive things why would anyone not want to read that?” (C3F5)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table 6.4 – Quotations related to Motives to Engage in C3**

C3 supporters identified multiple motives they had for engaging with the club’s social media content. In addition to motives such as humour and passion, respondents stated that the social media platform being used had an impact on the likelihood of engagement.

### 6.2.2. Stage Two Club Interviews

This section presents the findings from club representative interviews conducted to meet RO2 and RO3. An in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with a social media account manager at C3.

#### 6.2.2.1. Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources

The respondent for C3 was a social media manager at a new account they had created, Reds by the Minute (RBTM), which was designed to provide a match day experience to fans who could not attend the game through interaction, engagement and the provision of information. It was produced as the primary club account (official account) did not provide match day coverage. The new account was set up to provide fan value and interaction, and received positive feedback during its trial period. C3's social media account manager describes the difference between the RBTM account and the club's primary account: they provide match coverage, video content and fan engagement. He also highlights that one of the major issues the primary club account has, is that it does not follow anyone or interact directly with fans on social media. The new account is currently on Twitter due to the microblogging nature of the platform.

In terms of resources as a volunteer, the social media account manager suggests that learning Photoshop is part of his personal development that will benefit the club. He also said that in order to further improve, they need another volunteer in place to help with the social media. This identifies an issue that many clubs have of limitations regarding the number of volunteers present at the club. However, there is also an indication from several club representatives that when multiple individuals are part of a social media team, inconsistency becomes an issue in how the channels are being used in terms of objectives, marketing expertise, and writing style. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.5.

Topic	Evidence
Respondent Role,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>"RBTM is just a live match day experience for the fans who can't attend the game. Just to give them the goal action...and it's the account that interacts with the fans the most."</i> (C3R1)</li></ul>

Channels, and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Yeah it takes over. There wasn’t much going on in regards to match day commentary on that one. They have a very specific vision for official account. So they wanted to just create this as an offset to the main account... we trialled it at a few friendlies and it got a good response so it’s been going ever since and haven’t missed a game so we’re doing well.” (C3R1)</li> <li>• “The main account doesn’t follow anyone, doesn’t tweet back to anyone. What we do is, usually there’s 2 of us and one will do the match day updates and then one will maybe go out and about with the fans, take videos and stuff or just simple as replying to a tweet, or retweeting...someone’s tweeted about the game, we tweet that and get people involved.” (C3R1)</li> <li>• “I’m currently learning Photoshop and it’s something I would use for that.” (C3R1)</li> <li>• “I’d like to get another person on board because there’s only two of us doing it at the minute. And with that it’s kind of frustrating because I’ve set up a way to do it and he goes a bit off script, which is a bit frustrating, so I’d like to get something structured in place...and consistency, I think that’s a thing we have to aim towards.” (C3R1)</li> </ul>
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**Table 6.5 – Quotations related to Respondent Role, Channels, and Resources in C3**

The representative for C3 identified his primary role as a social media account manager. This account was exclusive to Twitter. He identified key limitations in terms of volunteers; and stated that he would like an additional volunteer available.

#### **6.2.2.2. Social Media Objectives and Purpose**

When identifying that the account was set up to interact and engage with fans, one of the reasons C3’s social media account manager indicated that the club had for not interacting with fans or providing match coverage was that they did not want to “clog up” the social media timelines of fans with multiple posts. This allows fans to have the option of receiving this value, or not. There have been no strategic objectives set by the club with creation of the new account other than to increase levels of engagement. C3’s social media account manager also identifies the need to appear professional on social media, as it recognises the importance of brand image on social media. C3 recognises that having no specific objectives or targets set by the club as being an issue and an area for improvement, and states that after the trial period there

will be scope to develop this. The social media manager recognises that if targets are to be developed, an understanding of how social media works and how fans interact is necessary to aid in the decision making process. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.6.

Topic	Evidence
<b>Objectives and Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“They wanted it separate because not everyone wants to see 40 to 50 tweets from 3 to 5pm on a match day, so they didn’t want to clog up peoples’ timeline – they wanted to make it an optional thing for C3 fans to do.” (C3R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Nothing really strategic...it’s just to improve the engagement...I think at the minute it’s basically a trial – the main account is just auto scheduled tweets and stuff. I think they’re a semi-professional club but they want to have a professional online presence in that regard.” (C3R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Not right now. That’s something I would love to get in, but right now the focus has just been making...proving it works...targets will be a long-term thing.” (C3R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table 6.6 – Quotations related to Objectives and Purpose in C3**

C3’s social media account manager identifies engagement as the key focus of social media use within his role. Additionally, he acknowledges that a lack of strategic approach is present currently within the club.

### **6.2.2.3. Club Use of Social Media**

C3 are one of the few clubs who have set guidelines on using social media for their volunteers: not using profanity or commenting on match officials. The account seems to focus primarily on fan satisfaction and interaction. This is tied to maintaining interest from existing fans – something that few other clubs mentioned specifically when discussing why social media was used within their respective clubs. However, C3’s social media account manager stated that if there is potential to generate new fans from the social media, this would be a positive outcome for the club.

As is the case with other clubs, there is a flexible approach to using social media, in that no specific plans are in place. C3’s social media account manager refers to a “script” that is used; in other words, a structure for the format of how content should be posted and a timeline for their order. He also stated that content containing images gets more interaction from followers than content without, which is important considering the key objectives for social media usage in C3. There is further

recognition that images are the most popular form of content for fan engagement and interaction. C3's social media account manager references using a 'meme' that was created with links to humour, a popular form of fan value from social media use. He states that this was a successful way in which the club had used social media. The link to humour explains the cause of its success in terms of interaction. C3's social media team also attempt to engage fans by prompting comments. This is achieved through asking questions, and asking for responses to increase interaction levels. When asked about shared content on social media, the social media account manager identifies that content which is fun gets people to interact with it.

This account is only active during match days – with the primary reason being that the primary club account is the source for information outside of the game. This shows that C3 have separated the provision of information from fan engagement and value. It does not mean that all informative content does not provide any value, but rather that the purpose of the account is not primarily to give fan value, but to raise awareness and communicate. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.7.

Topic	Evidence
Use of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "...one of the big things we've noticed is ex-pats who were C3 fans abroad – they're loving it. We had about a hundred German fans came after the Northern Ireland - Germany game on Saturday, and they've been interacting with the account since then. So it's basically to keep people interested, it's for existing fans and if we can create a new fan from that it's just the icing on the cake." (C3R1)</li> <li>• "It's really completely flexible. We have a sort of – a script that I came up with – it's just in the format of how we want the tweets to be done...kick-off, half-time and full-time. I asked to put an image for those tweets because they're the ones that seem to get the most interaction." (C3R1)</li> <li>• "No it's not active at all. They like to have the eyes on the main account when it's not match day because it's got the most information for people in between." (C3R1)</li> <li>• "Just even images of the game....nothing special – just off my phone – I have a decent camera on my phone. One of our most successful tweets - I put up a meme and it got 120 retweets so that was the most successful one. So pictures, and well one meme have been the most successful thing. The GIFs are pretty popular." (C3R1)</li> <li>• "We'll often prompt comments – we'll ask them you know, try to end all tweets that aren't updates with a question trying to get people interacting with the tweets." (C3R1)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“So to get people to interact you have to have a bit of fun with the content.” (C3R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table 6.7 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Use in C3**

The social media account manager states that a flexibility exists within the club’s use of social media. He also identifies several ways they attempt to facilitate engagement, including prompting comments or responses from club supporters on Twitter.

#### **6.2.2.4. Club Social Media Value**

C3’s social media account manager reiterates that the main focus again is on interaction and providing information to the fans. The social media account manager also states that the primary account is “stale”, and may have a negative opinion of it due to the lack of interaction with supporters. Through providing examples of how fans are being engaged with, value is identified. There is also hope from C3 that fans will have a better perception of the club’s social media. Therefore, another way in which value is received is through brand perception. There are further descriptions given of some communication that goes on with fans on the new social media account, and the issue with the primary account and lacking interaction is identified.

It is also recognised that more value can be received from social media for the club. C3 intends to improve how the RBTM account is being used in relation to promoting revenue streams available at the club. Currently this is something the primary account is used for primarily; however, there is recognition of the potential value lost from awareness of promotions existing at the social club, or other facilities. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.8.

<b>Social Media Value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“They’re quite particular at the minute about doing that. They like to advertise the social club offers on the main page, whereas I argue that the RBTM account should be a match day experience like 9am to 9pm...so that is definitely something I would like to get in and, you know, entice people down with offers.” (C3R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think it gives a different outlet for fans to interact with the club. Like before they knew that if they tweeted the club they weren’t going to get anything back, you know? People come to the account to get the half time draw number, for example, which was never done on the original Twitter. They had to find out what time the club shop, or club – social club is open, I’ll ask and just tweet</i></li> </ul>
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	<p><i>back, because sometimes that information is not so easy to find on the main account or website.” (C3R1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Absolutely. It’s been a good trial so far and I think the club is seeing the benefit of it, and it’s just putting a lot more eyes on the game...and a lot less negative opinions of the Twitter. People will maybe disregard the staleness of the – the club Twitter. And they’ll take this as maybe the one that they’ll consider when they’re talking about it.” (C3R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table 6.8 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Value in C3**

C3’s social media account manager identifies that interaction from fans is a primary value experienced by the club from their use of social media. Furthermore, he states that receiving information from social media is more beneficial to supporters, improving fan satisfaction. He also states that the club is seeing benefit from having a social media account focused on fan engagement.

#### **6.2.2.5. Social Media Issues**

C3’s social media account manager identifies capital as a key limitation in terms of social media use. He also recognises that it would be difficult for the club to monitor and analyse return on investment, therefore making it difficult for them to provide a budget to use on social media. Additionally, the social media manager identifies that this is something which may happen in the future. This is an issue identified by several other clubs, who also suggest that it reduces the value or desire in creating specific objectives. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.9.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
<b>Issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“In terms of this account it’s hard to monitor the success of return on investment, so you’re not really going to get the go ahead until you start seeing some. I’m pushing for C3 shop ads, like you know better tracking....it’s not really something a club is going to be able to do but it’s something I’d eventually like to do if we can find a way to do it very cheaply.” (C3R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table 6.9 – Quotations related to Issues in C3**

The social media account manager identifies two primary issues with social media. He stated previously that he is lacking in human resources. Further to this, he identifies

that an inability to monitor return on investment limits how much resources the club will give to the social media team.

### **6.2.3. Summary of Findings**

Five C3 fans were interviewed, these fans represented the Casual Follower, Social Devotee and Committed Supporter categories within the typology. These fans identified camaraderie, match highlights, information, and social interaction as key forms of value obtained through club social media. Primary motives to engage with the content included helping others, entertainment, and attachment to the club through self-identification. C3 have created a unique approach to the social media channels they use for marketing communications. They have separated their primary club account from a spin-off used for engagement and match coverage. There are therefore differences in the overall goals of these accounts; the primary account is used for communication, with maintaining brand image as a focus. The RBTM account is focused on fan value through interaction and coverage of the match. There are some difficulties in managing these, identified by the C3 representative, such as lack of volunteers. Awareness and communication are values linked with promotion, attendance and revenues. Interaction and engagement are linked with fan value. The club representative for C3 identifies that tracking return on investment through the engagement on social media will lead to budget allocation to improve the social media content they are offering to their fans.

## **6.3. Case Study of C6**

The case study of C6 consisted of one fan interview and three in-depth interviews with three club representatives (social media team managers). C6 had the largest social media team of all cases, and had the most experienced with image and video content. C6 is case six of eight, and is referred to as C6.

### **6.3.1. Stage One: Fan Interviews**

This section presents the findings from fan interviews conducted to meet RO1 and RO3. In total, two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in the case of C6.



### 6.3.1.1. Fan Classification

In relation to fan classification, C6F1 is a Committed Supporter of C6. He attends the vast majority of matches each season. Interestingly, he links superstition with his decision whether or not to purchase a season ticket, stating that if he purchases one the team tends not to play well. C6F1 travels to both home and away matches indicating his loyalty level. C6F2 is classed as a Committed Supporter of C6. He states that he attends the majority of matches. However, he is not currently a season ticket holder despite attending a large number of matches. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.10.

Topic	Evidence
<b>Fan Classification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “Yeah I’m a season ticket holder this season. So I flip between buying season tickets because sometimes I think every season that I buy a season ticket we have a bad season. It’s more a superstition thing, but this year I bought a season ticket and it’s looking like a bad season so I may just pay through the gate, but I usually go home and away.” (C6F1)</li><li>• “Every match, home and away.” (C6F1)</li><li>• “I would go every week... well nearly every week.” (C6F2)</li><li>• “I was for about 15 years but the last five years I’ve – I just pay every week – don’t have a season ticket.” (C6F2)</li></ul>

**Table 6.10 – Quotations related to Fan Classification in C6**

Both fans interviewed were Committed Supporters of C6. However, neither owned season tickets despite attending a large number of matches. Both identified that they had been supporters since childhood.

### 6.3.1.2. Social Media Behaviour

C6F1 is classed as a passive user of social media, as he does not often contribute content to any platforms. He primarily uses Facebook as opposed to Twitter. Interestingly, he also identifies the website as social media. This illustrates that he experiences values through using the website that are the same as when he uses social media, such as receiving information. He also said that they used private messaging applications such as WhatsApp for communication. C6F2 follows C6 on social media. He acknowledges that they have a twitter account; however, he states that he does not

have Twitter, so does not follow them on it. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.11.

Topic	Evidence
<b>Social Media Behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Yeah, we do use the website and Facebook and we have our wee C6 WhatsApp group within the guys that I go to football with too so yeah, we’d use that. I wouldn’t be so much Twitter or I wouldn’t be a contributor to Facebook, I would be more of a contributor to our WhatsApp group because I know everybody.” (C6F1)</li> <li>• “Yes – I follow them on Facebook.” (C6F2)</li> <li>• “As far as I know they also do like a live feed on Twitter, so like they’d do commentary on the match but I don’t have Twitter so I wouldn’t pick up.” (C6F2)</li> </ul>

**Table 6.11 – Quotations related to Social Media Behaviour in C6**

Both respondents used Facebook as their primary social media platform. While C6F1 identified his use of WhatsApp, neither individual used twitter.

### **6.3.1.3. Social Media Value**

In relation to the value experienced through social media use, C6F1 cites information as his primary motive for using Facebook. He also indicated that the information available to him on Facebook can be sought on the Irish League forums. He states that this is a source of rumour or gossip among fans. One of the values he looks for is banter between fans, and fan-to-fan interaction. He also said that match highlights or video content provides value to him – and he discussed the video channel that C6 produce. C6F2 identifies that C6 have limited professionalism in regards to their Facebook page. He suggests that there is room for improvement in regards to how they use it for marketing purposes. His primary value experienced from social media is information from the club. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.12.

Topic	Evidence
<b>Social Media Value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Facebook I would sort of use it for information, and the Irish League forum I would use it for information too - sometimes just pick up a bit of gossip if you’re looking to see if transfers are being made. Or else you can go on the other clubs and see sometimes they’re</li> </ul>

	<p><i>having as bad of a time as we are. So that cheers you up a bit.” C6F1</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“They have got a Glens TV thing so sometimes I’ve been there to see goals, or if there’s an incident and, well, maybe see the incident again from a different viewpoint, but yeah I would use it.” (C6F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“They wouldn’t have an awful lot on Facebook – I don’t think they use it as much as they should do. I think they just have it for the sake of it rather than using it like for an advertising tool.” (C6F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“They would sometimes put videos that someone has recorded – they would let you know about events. They wouldn’t have any sort of marketing on it, or wouldn’t have interviews with players or anything like that. It wouldn’t be a very professional Facebook page.” (C6F2)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table 6.12 – Quotations related to Fan Social Media Value in C6**

Both respondents used the Facebook content from C6 primarily for information. C6F2 identified room for improvement from the club through better use of the channel for marketing purposes.

#### **6.3.1.4. Motives to Engage**

As a passive user, C6F1 does not engage with social media content on a consistent basis. However, he does suggest that when he engages with content it is to share with his friends on his private social network. He identifies the type of content he might share would be information, for the purpose of making his friends aware. This engagement with content will have less impact on raising awareness in non-consumers from the club’s point of view. C6F2 discusses humour as a motive for engaging with social media content. He also identifies that it would have to be interesting to him in order for engagement to occur. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.13.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
<b>Motives to Engage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Usually they’re probably looking at the same stuff I’m looking at, but sometimes I may throw our attention to someone - you might see someone on the BBC website, or you might see something on another website about a player that used to play for C6 and send them a link to it.” (C6F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I suppose it would have to be interesting – I would follow other football teams on Facebook, like in the</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>Premier League like Spurs and stuff and obviously their FB would be a lot better than an Irish League team.” (C6F2)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Yes, I would tag my friends and stuff but that would usually be if I thought something was funny. More than like if it was marketing.” (C6F2)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table 6.13 – Quotations related to Motives to Engage in C6**

### **6.3.2. Stage Two Club Interviews**

This section presents the findings from club representative interviews conducted to meet RO2 and RO3. In total, three in-depth interviews were conducted with three club representatives in the case of C6

#### **6.3.2.1. Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources**

C6 have a team of six individuals who have input into the social media activities. Three of the respondents had separate roles within the club: C6R1 was in charge of the Facebook match coverage, C6R2 technical side and analytics on social media, and C6R3 was involved in YouTube and video editing for the club. As there were two individuals involved with the video content, C6 was one of the few clubs able to take advantage of the benefits of video content in terms of engagement with fans on their social media. In addition to this, one way in which the social media team of C6 are able to save time is through linking the accounts or channels together. C6R2 mentions that Instagram and Facebook are linked so that the content replicates itself. This means that anyone who follows C6 on one channel but not the other will still have access to the same content, increasing the level of accessibility for fans.

The team at C6 use all available social media channels (including Snapchat and Instagram). However, there was not much discussion on these platforms, as the focus from the club was on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Part of the reason why all channels are being used is because of the large amount of volunteers seemingly available to C6 when compared to other clubs. However, this causes some issues regarding consistency with messages, as there are many different individuals involved in managing the channels and some of the individuals do not share the same values of professionalism when using social media. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.14.

Topic	Evidence
<b>Respondent Role, Channels, and Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Basically it’s a combined effort from all of us to...basically just social media in general. Like we’ve all got our different roles.” (C6R1)</li> <li>• “We use them all, we do the Instagram stuff.” (C6R2)</li> <li>• “And then Suzy is Snapchat.” (C6R1)</li> <li>• “The majority of the stuff would be on Facebook and Twitter – YouTube’s all the highlights obviously.” (C6R2)</li> <li>• “Instagram’s linked to Facebook too – you can see Instagram stuff on Facebook now. If anybody comments on the Instagram we can see the comments on Facebook.” (C6R2)</li> </ul>

**Table 6.14 – Quotations related to Respondent Role, Channels, and Resources in C6**

The respondents from C6’s social media team identified their roles. One respondent was in charge of producing video content, and the other two stated they worked together on multiple social media channels.

#### **6.3.2.2. Social Media Objectives and Purpose**

When discussing the objectives of social media use, C6R2 states that the club only have one objective: “*interaction with the fans*” (C6R2). It is possible that due to the number of individuals involved in the social media of the club that creating more specific objectives would be difficult to generate and effectively carry out. Throughout the interview there are other objectives that emerge, even though they are not directly identified by the respondents.

#### **6.3.2.3. Club Use of Social Media**

C6R1 acknowledges the importance of being professional on social media. He emphasised the need to take care using social media as negative use can have a damaging impact on the brand image of the organisation. This is mentioned several times during the interview, and arises as an issue caused by the number of volunteers involved in social media at the club. The respondents identify the want and need to be professional on social media – and also acknowledge that this would potentially cause issues if other members operating the less popular accounts were involved, as they do not take care when using spelling or grammar.

When discussing the implementation of social media guidelines to alleviate these issues, C6R2 stated that as C6 has multiple social media accounts, another problem arises as different accounts have different styles and types of content. Additionally, not all fans will be following each account and therefore not receiving all available information. It also has negative impacts on internal communication between the managers of each account, where necessary information may not be readily available if queries are made by fans, thus reducing the value that some fans will experience when attempting to communicate with the club.

C6 were aware that video content can be used in different ways to make their social media more engaging. While many clubs acknowledge that player signings get a lot of interaction, C6 can announce a player signing through video content which has a high amount of engagement. When elaborating on the kind of viewership that video content receives, C6R1 and C6R2 give an example of their use of drone footage from over the stadium that received 15000 views in one hour. This shows the speed at which highly engaging content can spread on social media.

Again, deliberating from a fan's perspective, C6R3 said that there is value for fans in video content – and this is another way in which fans can engage with behind the scenes detail. He also described it as fans feeling like a part of the club, which links back to self-identification and value with the club. Discussing the merits of video content further, C6R3 identified that it was not the channel YouTube that was important for viewership, but rather the content itself. He furthers this by stating that the video content is also popular on Facebook in addition to YouTube.

C6R1 said that only existing fans and followers of the account can be targeted with information. He recognised that unless information is shared on social media, non-followers will not be aware of content. The social media team acknowledged that C6 may not be creating content that is achieving larger goals of increasing attendance, and generating revenue through reaching a non-aware audience.

When discussing a planned approach to using social media, the respondents mention that there is an automated “on this day” type of content that is posted every day. This provides value to fans, either through nostalgia or by providing those with new information. When elaborating on their flexible approach, they state that it cannot be planned because they do not know what is going to happen. Like the other clubs, this

oversight on the strategic benefits of planning social media content is causing them to lose out on potential value, such as, revenue or greater levels of awareness and engagement among fans. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.15.

Topic	Evidence
Use of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“We would be very protective of the accounts because obviously they’re official accounts. So especially because of the blue tick and all – we have to be careful what we put on nowadays.” (C6R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“We had a video there a couple of weeks ago – he actually got permission to fly his drone outside and it got a lot of views.” (C6R2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I kind of gave the club a guideline I wrote – conflict regarding social media at the club. There’s so many social media accounts and I’ve actually gave the club guidelines to get it down to one – we’re getting there, because there’s one for the superstore, there’s one for the Milk Bar – and they can all be under one account. And so then you can have everybody doing exactly the same thing – there’s meant to be guidelines coming from NIFL sometime, but nothing yet.” (C6R2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The way me and (C6R2) look at it, because we’ve been doing it for ten years now and we’ve always taken the professional route of doing it – you see some stuff they put up and you don’t want them to have access to the account. Even minor things like spelling, grammar.” (C6R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I suppose the only ones we can target are existing followers. Unless people follow us on Twitter they’re not going to see our tweets.” (C6R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Well only in the last couple of weeks (C6R2) has started doing the “On this day”.” (C6R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“We don’t use it in terms of pre-planned stuff apart from that one thing, because on a day to day basis we don’t know what’s going to happen. The only other thing that is planned is the highlights going up on a Saturday night, or very early Sunday morning.” (C6R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“One thing that we’ve improved on this last 6 to 8 months is updating all of our platforms consistently with the same stuff.” (C6R3)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Fans seem to enjoy a lot of the video work and it’s me and Dave that run the TV channel. Dave does a lot of the match updates and I try and chip in as much as possible with behind the scenes – film training sessions. That bond between the players and the fans. We’ve missed that the last couple of</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>years, so the fans feel a part of it when they see that and love it.” (C6R3)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I find a lot of the YouTube stuff – we signed McDaid and it was in the pipeline for a couple of days so myself, C6R1 and C6R2 could sit down and talk about different ideas, and C6R2 had actually mentioned getting a football manager to announce the signing, so I was able to get that done. I put the video on Facebook and look at the amount of hits it got.” (C6R3)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I don’t find the YouTube being massive - I just find the video content – people want to watch video content. Like if I upload it on Facebook – match updates or the match highlights are for YouTube in my opinion.” (C6R3)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table 6.15 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Use in C6**

C6’s social media team lack guidelines from the club or league body. They state this causes issues due to the large number of social media accounts and channels that the club has, as there is an inconsistency in communication style across multiple platforms. They use social media to engage with supporters and create video content, which is identified as being successful in achieving this.

#### **6.3.2.4. Club Social Media Value**

C6R2 identifies that a benefit of social media is the speed at which information can be communicated to an audience; this is both by a posting content and replying to queries that the club receives. Regarding the benefits of social media, C6R1 elaborated on how interaction is a new feature of marketing communications that was previously unavailable on websites. He said that in terms of fans wanting to get information, social media is the first place they will go. This indicates that the provision of information via social media is a clear objective. While it was identified earlier that fans sometimes overlooked what was available, the social media managers have an awareness that this is an important aspect of marketing communications and the content they put on their social media channels.

An interesting example of where Dutch fans have attended matches at C6 is given, and it is identified that this increase in awareness and interest was available only through social media. Both teams wear the same colours, so a relationship via social media between fans has developed. While C6 are semi-professional, any increase in attendance can have a positive impact on the limited resources that are available.



Again, C6R1 said that this awareness and interest would not have existed before social media, showing one way in which the club receives value.

In an attempt to generate a budget, the social media managers are looking at ways to develop sponsorship. Because sponsors primarily benefit from awareness, increased numbers in terms of viewership and engagement would provide greater value in the proposition being offered. The managers recognise that high levels of awareness on a club's social media, can have a greater impact on revenue gained through sponsorship. In other words, increasing awareness can lead to increased sponsorship as an alternative revenue stream, and a way for clubs to generate autonomous revenue.

The social media managers at C6 have recognised more value from social media than the club board, as they note issues in communicating its importance with board members. This indicated that if social media is not being used effectively as a marketing communications channel there will be limited value received. If the club is not seeing value from social media then it's possible it has not been used in the right way. However, the social media manager has made a conscious effort to convey the benefits of social media in an attempt to lead to greater value being realised (monetary value and fan value). Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.16.

Topic	Evidence
<b>Social Media Value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Basically to get the information out quickly – there’s a lot of simple things we get, for the game tonight it’s all tickets and people want an instant reply so people don’t go elsewhere in case they don’t get the information in time.” (C6R2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“We take the social media on ourselves and we’ve been trying to get the club to use it more than the club giving us any objectives, so we’ve been pushing them – we’ve been trying to persuade them what social media can do for them.” (C6R2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think that interaction now because there wasn’t as much interaction before it all started. People used to go onto just the website to get information. And there’s football forums people can go on to get information, but the best way to get that information is directly from the club. I’d say our Twitter</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>and Facebook are the first point of contact for anybody nowadays.” (C6R1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“On social media you maybe see the amount of ones from Holland - and you see that they’re NEC fans, and they follow us and we follow them back because it’s just that relationship. But then again if there was no such thing as Twitter or Facebook that just wouldn’t happen to the level that it has over the last couple of years.” (C6R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Our social media – we’re updating all platforms on social media and we haven’t had anyone – now we’ve got a document this past week were going to try and send it around and get someone to sponsor man of the match or player of the month just so we can have – a kitty to use for various different ideas we have, or any upgrades to the camera equipment we need.” (C6R3)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table 5.16 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Value in C6**

The social media team at C6 identify provision of information and communication with supporters as key values experienced by the club. They further this by stating that interaction with fans is important in developing a relationship. Additionally, the club are attempting to use social media to facilitate revenue development in order to create a social media budget.

#### **6.3.2.5. Social Media Issues**

The social media team managers have experienced of some frustration with communicating information that has been ignored by fans. They said that even though they use social media to provide information regarding matches, people do not seek it out and instead ask the club directly. This is because the information is only made available once, and that people are not interacting with it and sharing it, and therefore it is not receiving the level of awareness that it should.

One of the more specific issues with social media at this club, is that a board member has occasionally posted on the club account by mistake. As social media is instant people are able to capture the mistake and then share it online, damaging the clubs brand image and reputation. This sort of incident highlights the need for strict guidelines regarding the use of club social media accounts. Similar to this, the respondents referenced problems with inconsistency and a lack of professionalism from some of the other members of the social media team.

One of the internal issues of the club was that they were giving valuable information out to the press before announcing it on their own marketing communications channels. This meant that people were getting the value from other sources and not associating the club's social media with this information. Several examples regarding the dissemination of information from the club were given. For example, the announcement of player signings. They state that social media should be a primary outlet for information as it will give the fans a reason to go there first, and interact more with the club, recognising potential value here.

Similar to all clubs in this study, the issue of not having a social media budget is apparent at C6. This is caused by the board not having knowledge of the potential monetary value in using social media effectively, and a limited knowledge of the potential for ROI on a budget for marketing. One of the problems regarding not having a budget is that the club have not been able to make use of paid advertising via social media. It is also unfeasible for clubs who do not have any marketing budget to use this, unless they can use social media to generate autonomous budgets.

Given that time is a major limitation in most clubs for using social media, C6R3 identifies that providing video content is a major commitment. Further commenting on issues of time, C6 have in the past brought in fans as support for the social media channels and to cover the match updates on Facebook and Twitter. An issue was identified, whereby these volunteers were using the club's social media to post their personal views rather than taking a professional approach to protect the brand image and reputation of the club. A key challenge for semi-professional clubs is to improve their existing resource levels in relation to volunteers. The volunteers that are willing to help in these channels do not have experience and need a form of guidance or guidelines to follow when using social media. Quotes relevant to this section are presented below in table 6.17.

Topic	Evidence
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"No matter how many times you put on your social media its pay at the gate, you'll get people asking you is it pay at the gate or ticket and you're going "look at our website"."</i> (C6R1)</li> <li>• <i>"His primary thing is that he forgets to log out of the club account before logging into his own account– naturally</i></li> </ul>

	<p>nowadays people screenshot it straight away and go look what C6 are doing – me or C6R2 gets the blame.” (C6R1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The only thing that we have never used on Facebook is the ones where you get £30 credit to pay – I don’t know whether it’s branded content – it’s like to boost your post kind of thing. We’ve never used that because we don’t have a budget for that...” (C6R1)</li> <li>• “I was here an hour and a half. The video stuff you take time to actually film what’s happening, the post editing and stuff takes about the same amount of time you spend shooting.” (C6R3)</li> <li>• “In the past we’ve brought people in to do Twitter updates who were fans and they took the approach “I’m a fan I’m allowed my own say” – on the official account you can’t really have that approach”. (C6R3)</li> <li>• “We’ve found a lot of people that do match updates and they’re different in the way they do the updates. Some of them are more professional the way they tweet the updates, and then you get some who are more...that are casually tweeting and it’s just that difference. Some fans actually prefer the casual tweeting of the updates rather than the professional ones that you would see clubs in England the way they would tweet their updates – I think that’s good.” (C6R3)</li> <li>• “In the past it would have been in the press before any of us knew – and we’re going “why is it in the press before we get anything?” (C6R1)</li> <li>• “That’s one issue we had for years - they didn’t give us any information at all – and we were cracking up, we’re trying in social media- you know yourself it’s the first place people go to nowadays. We don’t want it appearing in the newspaper, they go to the social media, the website, the Twitter to find the information and they get it now straight away.” (C6R1)</li> <li>• “We have no money whatsoever. This is – everything we do can be done with no money really... If we went to the board and said can we have a budget for social media they’d go “aye dead on!” There’s no chance – you wouldn’t ask them because you know the answers going to be no. But we’ve utilised every avenue of social media as best we can with basically no budget whatsoever.” (C6R1)</li> </ul>
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**Table 6.17 – Quotations related to Issues in C6**

The social media team at C6 have identified multiple ways in which issues arise through their social media use. One of these problems is caused by damages to their brand image through misuse of the club’s accounts. Additionally, they have no social media budget which causes limitations on utilising paid advertising.

### **6.3.3. Summary of Findings**

The fan respondent for C6 identified as a Committed Supporter. As a passive user of social media, it is expected that he primarily uses it to gather information as opposed to engaging with content. He identifies online forums as a source for fan interaction and social value. However, he does not discuss this on social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. C6 have one of the larger social media teams, naming up to six members. They were able to regularly produce high quality video content for their followers. They identified that fan interaction was the purpose of using social media, and that video content was linked to higher levels of engagement. They identified several issues such as internal structure and communication that has a negative impact on how social media is used at the club.

<b>C3 – Overview of Findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C3 recognised the need for engagement, and created a unique Twitter account for this purpose.</li> <li>• The club have received positive feedback from fans in relation to the new approach to social media use.</li> <li>• There is a recognition from the social media manager that the new account should be utilised better to promote the club’s alternative revenue streams.</li> <li>• C3 fans identified a preference for Twitter over Facebook, and discussed that more information was found on this channel.</li> <li>• C3F1 identified a lack of fan interaction from the club; this data was collected prior to the creation of the new social media account. This identifies some strategic use of social media within the club.</li> </ul>
<b>C6 – Overview of Findings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C6 had the resources available to produce video content more regularly than other clubs.</li> <li>• C6 provided examples of issues caused by a lack of social media guidelines, including damage to brand image.</li> <li>• C6 attempted to generate revenue through sponsorship facilitated by social media.</li> <li>• C6 have multiple accounts for their facilities (bar, superstore, etc.) which causes issues in coordinating social media use within the club.</li> </ul>

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One fan of C6 actively wants to encourage attendance from new people through their personal social media use.</li></ul> |
|---|

**Table 6.18 – Summary of Key Findings from C3 and C6.**

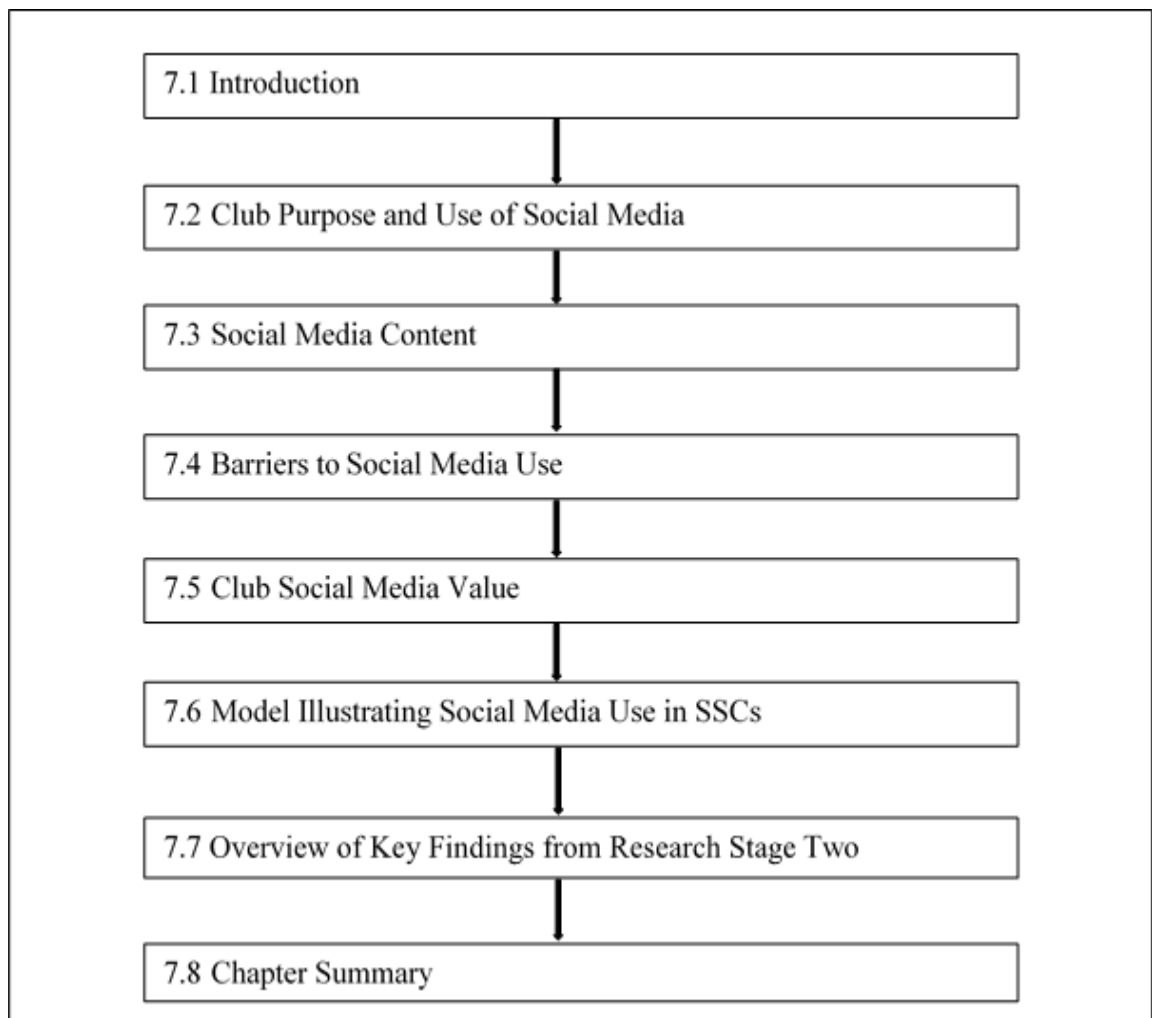
#### **6.4. Chapter Summary**

Chapter five reports the findings of the empirical research in case study format. Two cases were presented, with the remaining four available in the Appendices. These findings relating to research objectives one and two were undertaken to meet the overall research aim, and to provide a basis for research objective three in the following chapter. In the following chapters the findings from each case will be analysed comparatively to determine overarching themes, and to develop a strategic framework for effective social media marketing in SSCs.

## **7.0. CHAPTER SEVEN: Research Stage Two Data Analysis**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected from stage two of the research. This stage of the empirical study consisted of interviews with club representatives. Initially the purpose and objective behind social media use in clubs is analysed. Following this, there is an outline of the key barriers identified by clubs. Findings relating to social media content creation are presented, along with the identification of realised value from social media application in clubs. This leads to the development of a model highlighting the overall process of social media application in clubs, with inputs, barriers and outputs presented. The structure of this chapter is presented in figure 7.1.



**Figure 7.1 – Research Stage Two Data Analysis Chapter Structure**

## **7.2. Club Purpose and Use of Social Media**

This section provides an analysis of the data relating to club purpose and use of social media. It presents findings relating to club objectives and the intent behind decision-making regarding social media within the clubs.

### **7.2.1. Increase Attendance**

A key purpose identified in many of the clubs for using social media was to increase attendance at matches. Six out of eight clubs identified this as a purpose of social media, whether as a direct objective or as a potential outcome of social media use: *“Basically it all started to try and get interest in the club. Whenever I first got involved in the club here we didn’t have a lot of support – local support, and we wanted to sort of reach out to a younger generation”* (C1R1). Several of these clubs identified that some of the increased attendance they saw was as a direct impact of social media, justifying their use of it for this purpose. Many of these clubs identified that increased attendances were because of increased levels of awareness in their fans who follow social media channels: *“Now I’m not sort of saying this has suddenly developed to getting crowds here of thousands – but were getting a good probably 3 times, 4 times more than we were back in 2009”* (C1R1). Therefore, links can be drawn between the desire to increase attendance and the need to generate awareness in order to do so.

C4 used social media to increase attendance through generating awareness of their Raise the Bar (RTB) initiative. C1 and C7’s social media managers both indicated that through engaging with a particular demographic via social media they desired increased levels of attendance: *“Mainly to engage the younger generation as well....Irish league clubs traditionally would sort of attract people from a more of a kind of vintage...but we’ve seen in recent seasons there has been a lot of younger folk coming through the gates and by and large those fans would be mostly – 99.9% of them are on social media. So the way you’re going to reach out to these people is through social media, and even engaging non-fans – or potential fans – that is...it is a big job to be on the likes of Facebook and Twitter because you just have such a wider reach than you would from your website”* (C7R1). C1’s social media manager was able to identify that this had a significant impact and therefore value was realised: *“It’s obviously the revenue that comes from the guys coming in. The younger*



*generation that are coming in are inclined to buy things – not only from the shop but we have things like burger stands here, so there's more of those sold... But again this is all a spin off we're finding from social media, because we inform the fans as well when matches are on – if there's a change” (C1R1).*

One issue clubs have is that it is difficult to quantify results of social media impact on attendance, as noted by C7's social media manager: *“It's hard to quantify that really...I'd say maybe you probably do get an increase in sort of gate based on stuff that's put out on social media...I'd say it wouldn't have a negative impact on people through the gates certainly” (C7R1).* This may dissuade them from committing fully to attempts of raising attendance on social media platforms, as they may feel there are risks involved regarding potential fan dissatisfaction. C8's social media manager provides an example of a specific fan who attended by use of social media: *“There was a guy sent a message to the Facebook page over the Christmas period and said that he wouldn't have gone – that he saw it was on and he sort of gave it a go, he hadn't been in years” (C8R1).* This provides evidence of the direct impact social media can have on increasing attendances at matches. C2's social media manager uses social media to communicate with fans, but mentions using content that encourages attendance. Therefore, while increasing attendance is the purpose, there are links to practical use of social media and types of content that are used by clubs to achieve this, such as information, communication, promotion, engagement and raising awareness: *“We saw the potential that it was a massive communication tool and I suppose the reason was to – maybe not as much communication actually, but I suppose in attracting – the main purpose for me anyway in the inception of it was to attract and increase attendances” (C2R1).*

### **7.2.2. Generate Revenue**

Similar to increasing attendance, several clubs discuss the intention of generating revenue through social media. In other words clubs are looking to facilitate their alternative revenue streams (to gate receipts) through social media. C6 were one club whose social media team identified that social media has commercial potential through promotion and generating sponsorship that may create a marketing budget: *“Our social media – we're updating all platforms on social media and we haven't had anyone – now we've got a document this past week we're going to try and send it*

*around and get someone to sponsor man of the match or player of the month just so we can have – a kitty to use for various different ideas we have, or any upgrades to the camera equipment we need” (C6R3).*

C7’s social media manager provide an example of using social media to facilitate shirt sales around the time of kit launches, and link this to engaging and shared content, tying in awareness as a key to the success in fulfilling this objective: *“The likes of kit launches they would market them and do sneak peek reveals of the kit like a week before it was due to be released. And I think in that sense whenever you’re tweeting stuff about a kit launch, for example, you are keen for people to share it and like it – or do whatever, comment on it because you want to have that interest, because shirt sales are going to be revenue through the door” (C7R1).*

C2’s social media manager suggests that there is a need for planning and strategy in order to effectively promote commercial offerings via social media: *“...if it’s engrained with all the commercial offerings that we have, it can be better used to promote that – and better used strategically with better planning” (C2R1).* C1’s social media advisor was able to develop a club shop through social media. This is linked to their use for increasing attendance among a younger demographic. It was stated that there was a desire for purchasing club merchandise because of this: *“We have a website and we have an actual shop – online shop that sells well, because we do have supporters from all over the world – guys who came from C1 originally” (C1R1).*

### **7.2.3. Generate Awareness**

The majority of clubs discuss using social media in order to raise awareness among fans: *“Certainly for supporter awareness of fixtures and using information that was going on our website that was replicated, and then over time it’s social media itself that has developed into a core communication tool, and a core source of where our supporters go for their information” (C2R1).* In addition to this, there are links identified from the data between content that is engaged with and increased awareness among new fans (discussed by C7 and C5’s social media managers):

*“For example, we’ve had a couple of Friday night games recently so you do get people tagging their friends or their mates in the post when they go up. I mean the last couple of Friday night attendances have been quite big compared to what they normally*

*would have been, so I would say that has had some sort of impact on what the attendance would have been at the games generally” (C5R1).*

*“I think there’s definitely going to be more awareness – there’s certainly not going to be less. I think it’s important to use social media outlets as best as possible because an extra like 100 spectators paying a tenner each – that’s an extra grand through the door – it’s not to be sniffed at” (C7R1).*

Because of this, it can be noted that increased levels of awareness will result from content that fans engage with as it will reach a wider audience. Awareness also is intrinsically linked with information (as a form of social media content). While the majority of clubs discussed awareness at some point in relation to social media, some did not recognise it as a purpose of using the channel. This shows a lack of marketing expertise or knowledge, as awareness is a key aspect of marketing communications.

C6’s social media team were able to link different forms of content that had an impact on how effective content was at generating awareness. It was suggested that videos got a significant increase in levels of engagement from fans: *“I don’t find the YouTube being massive - I just find the video content – people want to watch video content. Like if I upload it on Facebook – match updates or the match highlights are for YouTube, in my opinion” (C6R3).* Timing was also an important factor noted in awareness by a C6 social media manager: *“...Basically to get the information out quickly – there’s a lot of simple things we get, for the game tonight it’s all tickets and people want an instant reply so people don’t go elsewhere in case they don’t get the information in time” (C6R2).*

Awareness is linked to social media as information spreads quickly. C6’s social media team identified that this may cause issues, as they have had instances in the past where social media has been used incorrectly, damaging the brand image of the club: *“His primary thing is that he forgets to log out of the club account before logging into his own account– naturally nowadays people screenshot it straight away and go look what C6 are doing – me or C6R2 gets the blame” (C6R1).*

C5 are an example of a club who recognise speed of information spread, and generation of awareness: *“So, you’re able to get the news out quicker than you would be in terms of a website and are able to engage a much wider audience in terms of the*

*impact of that news. So I mean the news spreads a lot faster on social media” (C5R1).* As they knew this was a characteristic of social media, it has encouraged them to use social media to communicate information and use it with the objective of increasing awareness. Other clubs’ social media managers mention using social media to increase awareness around fixture changes (C1, C8):

*“And we did that for our Boxing Day fixtures and the big games we’ve run competitions and we’ve run giveaways and stuff... so the potential is there – people then think “there’s a match on wanna go?” So you’re promoting yourself – selling yourself. And as well the trust things, communication with your fans, it’s broadening your communication with people that don’t normally see what’s going on” (C8R1).*

*“...We inform the fans as well when matches are on – if there’s a change. As I say, this Friday we have a match, so we will have a bit of a build up to it on social media and we find Friday nights obviously bring more people in” (C1R1).*

While clubs recognise websites as a marketing communications channel, due to the ability to increase awareness at a more efficient rate (faster, and to a wider audience), clubs see benefit in using social media. There are clear links between generating awareness and attendance, as C4’ social media manager identifies opposing fans attending one of their Champions League matches as a neutral because of being made aware that tickets were available through social media: *“...even if their team’s not playing people come over. I was sitting at the Champions League qualifier last year with C7 fans sitting beside me. Now to me that was mad because there were C7 fans at Seaview not supporting C7... they came because they knew it wasn’t sold out – based on social media” (C4R1).*

C8’s social media manager discusses using paid advertisements on social media to increase awareness. However, it is suggested (along with other clubs) that the impact of this is unknown. C8’s social media manager states that while there was a larger amount of viewership of the content, it was difficult to attribute it solely to paid advertising; and if the views came from this, they may not be the target audience: *“It’s really hard to gauge because I’d always try and keep track of our tool and keep an idea of how our post is doing all the time...and Facebook sort of show you this is how many natural views you’ve had, and this is how many paid views...and I sort of don’t*

*know if it's worth it because those paid views either... would they get it anyway, or they aren't really the target?"* (C8R1). Issues like this highlight the semi-professional nature of these clubs and that an understanding of social media is required in order to allocate capital or increased levels of other resources towards it.

#### **7.2.4. Communication with Followers**

Communication, like information has strong ties to awareness. In this instance, communication is used to refer to the intention to communicate information to an audience (fans or followers of the club) and with them in dialogue (responding to queries and questions). Again, clubs have highlighted that as a channel of communicating social media is very effective because of the fast-paced nature: *"So, you're able to get the news out quicker than you would be in terms of a website and are able to engage a much wider audience in terms of the impact of that news. So I mean the news spreads a lot faster on social media"* (C5R1). However, issues are identified by C6's social media team who suggest that fans may overlook what they post and waste valuable time by querying the club for information that has already been given: *"No matter how many times you put on your social media its pay at the gate, you'll get people asking you is it pay at the gate or ticket and you're going 'look at our website'"* (C6R1). This also has impacts at a practical level in terms of restricting further the resources of the club.

C8's social media manager suggests that because of social media their overall communication with fans has improved dramatically, to the extent where they are gaining improved levels of fan attachment: *"I personally have seen it – people become closer to the club because of that open communication...By getting these behind the scenes access interviews and sort of clips, you're getting that feel of attachment again I think"* (C8R1).

While all clubs have recognised the value of communication in social media, not all discussed it as a primary objective. One club whose social media manager did was C2, who highlighted that communication with fans was the key objective of their social media efforts: *"At the core communicating information is key to everyone's heart and I think we've got quite good at that, and there's not really much goes on in the club without some sort of online representation..."* (C2R1). This was then elaborated on to include other objectives such as commercial potential and engagement: *"I think*

*certainly with Facebook, which is probably where engagement really can push content forward – we try and engage, and try and get more supporters involved and talking with things, because it's very clear if we have something that's posted at the wrong time, or posted without any sort of real need for engagement, it doesn't get the viewership that it probably merits"* (C2R1). C3 set up a new social media account in order to communicate and engage with fans on match days, to improve fan value: *"Reds by the Minute is just a live match day experience for the fans who can't attend the game. Just to give them the goal action...and it's the account that interacts with the fans the most"* (C3R1).

### **7.2.5. Engagement with Supporters**

Many of the clubs interviewed discussed wanting to use social media to engage and interact with their fans. This can be seen as a form of communication between club and fan, although no specific message is necessarily communicated. Interaction and engagement with content is caused by a variety of factors that must be present. As identified through the fan interviews regarding RO1, there must be some form of value from the fan's perspective in order to engage or interact with the content. It is the club's responsibility to provide this as best as possible if that is the club's purpose for using social media. If this content also has a message tailored towards a wider goal, such as increasing attendance then the club itself may receive mutual value as these fans are more inclined to attend, or people within their social network will become aware of the club's value proposition. This is a key characteristic of social media when compared to other marketing communications channels such as website, where interactivity are not inherent.

Using social media for fan engagement can allow fans to interact with the club or players, adding increased levels of fan value through attachment to the club. C5's social media manager suggests that interacting directly with the club occurs more frequently on Facebook as opposed to Twitter; however, other forms of engagement such as sharing are more prevalent on Twitter: *"However, the Facebook to be honest with you is probably a bigger scope and a wider scope in terms of the reactions and the interaction to posts – you would probably get a lot more on the Facebook page than on the Twitter page these days"* (C5R1).

C3 are a club that actively encourage fans to interact with the content they post, through posing questions, rather than just providing information: *"We'll often prompt comments – we'll ask them you know, try to end all tweets that aren't updates with a question trying to get people interacting with the tweets"* (C3R1). What is apparent, is that while most clubs discuss interaction, not all stated that it was a key objective of the club. This would imply that creating engaging content occurs by accident rather than on purpose, highlighting the lack of strategy in social media use. Most clubs highlight different forms of content that fans interact with; C1's social media advisor note goals, C8's social media manager states that good and bad news gets engagement, and run competitions to raise awareness and their following:

*"They will comment for instance if a goal goes in and it's curled in from the penalty box, you will comments – 'great goal', 'fantastic'... If a player plays well or seems to play well, there's comments after the game. So there's a lot of interaction on it..."* (C1R1).

*"Yeah people do share your posts – they share them generally when there's good news, and the opposition fans share them when it's bad news so you always get some form of shares..."* (C8R1).

This would suggest that no matter the purpose of what content is provided to fans, there is scope to facilitate or increase engagement levels of this. Several clubs note some issues in interacting with fans on social media. The clubs are scared to interact with fans in case there are negative consequences of this, such as damaged brand reputation. C8's social media manager identifies an issue when interacting, as fans don't feeling left out and becoming dissatisfied: *"It takes a wee bit of balls too because once you start interacting you can't stop. Once you interact to one guy, you really have to interact to the next one for there to be any sort of fairness. It's a hard balance"* (C8R1).

A need for guidelines regarding social media use in clubs is necessary in order to alleviate these issues. However, as some clubs did not recognise these issues when discussing interaction and engagement it can be said that it is not an issue that all clubs

are aware of. This provides more evidence that there is little strategy or planning when using social media in clubs at this level of sport.

The clubs also identify that different types of content can encourage different levels of interaction and engagement. Many clubs, such as C6's social media team identify interacting with fans as a key purpose are utilising image and video in order to increase levels of engagement on their social media: *"I find though a lot of the YouTube stuff – we singed McDaid and it was in the pipeline for a couple of days so myself C6R1 and C6R2 could sit down and talk about different ideas, and C6R2 had actually mentioned about doing a football manager way to announce the signing, so I was able to get that done. I put the video on Facebook and look at the amount of hits it got"* (C6R3).

C7's social media manager states that clubs in general have been moving away from more traditional forms of marketing and are now aiming to increase engagement as it is becoming a requirement from fans (see section 7.2.1 for quote from C7R1).

C2's social media manager proposes that it is most common for fans to complain together. This would suggest that social value, banter and camaraderie are forms of fan value that can tie into what would appear to be negative engagement: *"complaining is probably the one I can really – there...by nature they just, the only time they interact with each other"* (C2R1).

Interestingly, C2's social media manager also advocates that Facebook is the best platform for engagement – and tie engagement in with awareness in regards to value. They state that if content is provided without purpose, or some intent to make it engaging then it does not receive the viewership that it otherwise would: *"I think certainly with Facebook, which is probably where engagement really can push content forward – we try and engage, and try and get more supporters involved and talking with things, because it's very clear if we have something that's posted at the wrong time, or posted without any sort of real need for engagement, it doesn't get the viewership that it probably merits"* (C2R1). This demonstrates that engaging content does result in higher levels of viewership and therefore awareness, making it more effective when communicating marketing information from the club such as value propositions. C8's social media manager has identified that positive fans and negative



fans will often interact with each other on their content (see earlier in section 7.2.5 for quote from C8R1).

Sharing of content is one way in which interaction and engagement manifests itself on social media. It is possibly the most effective way at content filtering into non-followers' networks. It is the result of a fan receiving value from club content, deciding to engage through sharing and that content then generating awareness in the network of the fan who shared it. This can lead to increased attendances, brand recognition, extra revenue generation and developed interest in the club. Clubs did not mention specifically creating content to get it shared, it was seen as a by-product of creating content that was interacted with and engaged.

#### **7.2.6. Social Media Guidelines**

A key issue identified in clubs was that there was very little given to the volunteers in terms of social media guidelines. Those who did mention guidelines, mostly identified it as using common sense; not to bring the club into disrepute, not to be negative or to comment on match officials: *"I mean we're obviously were told...unofficially, off the record, to be as positive as possible. Nothing negative about the club"* (C7R1). Clubs also identified that the league body, NIFL, did not provide additional guidelines or anything more specific than the general advice given by their clubs: *"There's meant to be guidelines coming from NIFL sometime, but nothing yet"* (C6R2).

Several clubs, C6 being one of which, have decided to develop social media guidelines for several purposes. In C6 the social media team desire consistency across their social media accounts, as there are many accounts being operated by different individuals, causing issues in professionalism and style: *"I kind of gave the club a guideline I wrote – conflict regarding social media at the club. There's so many social media accounts and I've actually gave the club guidelines to get it down to one – we're getting there, because there's one for the superstore, there's one for the Milk Bar – and they can all be under one account. And so then you can have everybody doing exactly the same thing"* (C6R2).

C3's social media manager identified that they had a "script" for this purpose; however, the respondent voiced his displeasure at the other member of the social media team not following it when posting: *"I'd like to get another person on board*

*because there's only two of us doing it at the minute. And with that it's kind of frustrating because I've set up a way to do it and he goes a bit off script, which is a bit frustrating, so I'd like to get something structured in place...and consistency, I think that's a thing we have to aim towards"* (C3R1).

Clubs who did mention creating guidelines for social media use saw it as having two benefits; firstly, there would be a structure to follow when creating content that would clarify purpose and intent of social media use. Secondly, it would help the club avoid issues that may damage brand image, such as posting controversial content. This supports the recognition of social media in these clubs as marketing communications channel and the importance of communicating the desired brand image effectively.

#### **7.2.7. Social Media Planning and Strategy**

The majority of clubs had difficulties in setting or articulating clear strategies in regards to their social media. When multiple volunteers were used as part of a team, there appear to be little coordination or planning in several instances, C3's social media manager being an example of a club representative who highlighted this as an issue: *"I've set up a way to do it and he goes a bit off script, which is a bit frustrating, so I'd like to get something structured in place...and consistency, I think that's a thing we have to aim towards"* (C3R1). This was primarily in regards to style of writing and professionalism (C6's social media manager): *"We've always taken the professional route of doing it – you see some stuff they put up and you don't want them to have access to the account. Even minor things like spelling, grammar. And like minor things – we're going if they have access to that god knows what could be going up you know?"* (C6R1).

C2's social media manager was aware of the lack of planning and strategy in their social media use, and described their approach as "reactive". This approach was apparent in other clubs, while not being directly identified: *"I think time constraint, if I go back to being reactive, time is something that people don't really – there might be ideas to get off the ground, or things that people want to do, and then because of the certain reactive nature, they don't really think the whole end to end process through, and it doesn't really get fulfilled either at all, or to the best of its potential"* (C2R1). Multiple clubs proposed that the reason for lack of planning was that sport cannot be planned for. Through this misconception they highlight the need for a

framework or model that can be followed to explain and aid in developing a plan for social media use. Several club representatives, including C2's social media manager state that planning is one area they wish to improve on; but highlight that a reliance on volunteers and a lack of time makes this difficult: *"There's a lot of good intention but it lacks the planning, it lacks the skillset, it lacks real strategy behind what we do at times"* (C2R1).

When clubs were discussing what planning they had in place, most was in relation to match days. C5's social media manager in particular stated that the club had a planned approach for match days; but had no plan for during the week:

*"I think it's kinda flexible, you know? I mean it would really depend on what's going on. Obviously, this week there's nothing really happening; so, there's not much news there or nothing for me to post this week. We kind of plan what to do in terms of the matches which on a match day would probably be quite active on the morning of the game. So, there would kind of be a set sequence of tweets in terms of the match preview if you were playing at home, obviously thanking the sponsors. The likes of playing away then doing the bus and stuff so, I wouldn't say it's a set plan but it would kinda be the same type of sequence that I would follow on any match day before and after the game"* (C5R1).

This highlights significant wasted time, in particular around developing interest and awareness of the match itself, which could increase attendance or generate revenue. The clubs do show some strategic approach in regards to fixture changes, where they plan to use social media to generate attendances at these. C5's social media manager identifies that these games have more potential for larger attendances and therefore it is important that the promotion of the games is more effective in order to exploit this: *"It would be more for the ones you are trying to push, if the games keep getting switched to a Friday night - the game has been switched by the club to a Friday night game because they think that there's a gauge to get better attendance at a Friday fixture than it would be for the Saturday fixture, so it is quite important and if that is the case to get that drummed up in terms of the interest"* (C5R1).

In relation to planning on match days, line-ups, team information and match commentary are the key areas that are planned. C7's social media manager states that they plan to use social media with their kit launches in order to raise awareness and

generate increased revenue. This shows that strategy is linked to social media use and business-related objectives by some clubs: (see section 7.2.2 for quote from C7R1).

These findings highlight key issues in SSCs involving limited social media strategy. Club representatives identified time as a key constraint in the development of social media strategy. Some limited planning was present in several clubs, regarding the timed release of social media content to elicit greater responses.

#### **7.2.8. Social Media Platform**

In regards to the platforms that clubs were using, all clubs use Facebook and Twitter. Several clubs use YouTube in addition to this for video content, highlights, and live streaming of matches: *“We’ve our own channel on YouTube which basically were putting it through that. So there’s no cross over because basically the BBC or Sky or anybody – because we’re in the Championship there’s no bounds”* (C1R1).

One way in which social media was being used effectively by C6, was that all content was posted on multiple platforms through the use of software:

*“Instagram’s linked to Facebook too – you can see Instagram stuff on Facebook now. If anybody comments on the Instagram we can see the comments on Facebook”* (C6R2).

*“One thing that we’ve improved on this last 6 to 8 months is updating all of our platforms consistently with the same stuff”* (C6R3).

They suggested that content went straight to both their Facebook and Instagram once posted, saving valuable time. Several clubs mentioned using Snapchat and Instagram. C8 had recently involved a fan-run Instagram channel in an official capacity to spread their resources and increase the number of channels that were available to them: *“Instagram – there’s a guy does Instagram as well but he’s only started so – he’s only been brought in recently as an official club media”* (C8R1). C2’s social media manager proposed that they tried using Instagram but did not have enough quality content (images) to post consistently and therefore felt that it may damage the brand image of the club: *“We took a conscious decision not to pursue Instagram at this point in time. We didn’t feel that we had access to a volume of photographs and images that would reflect the club”* (C2R1).

There was an identification by C5 and C8's social media managers that different platforms had different levels of fan following them, and this resulted in engagement occurring differently (see section 7.2.5 for quote from C5's social media manager):

*"The amount of feedback we get is very impressive. I look at Facebook and Twitter mostly, the Twitter page is your hardcore fans whereas Facebook seems to be a lot of your fairweather fans. So that is why we target our promotions through Facebook rather than Twitter – we've noticed that difference between the audience. And the promotion side does get a big hit on Facebook"* (C8R1).

In these cases, Facebook was seen to have more engagement in terms of conversations and interactions between fans while Twitter was more frequently used for sharing of content.

### **7.3. Social Media Content**

Club representatives provided data relating to the forms of content that was communicated to fans through their social media channels. These varying forms of content related to different fan values, and had varying impacts on the levels of engagement received. However, video content and image based content was more time consuming, and thus had a greater impact on the resources required to provide this to fans.

#### **7.3.1. Engaging Content**

When discussing the creation of engaging or interactive content that could be created for social media, most clubs cited that imagery and video received more engagement. C6's social media team were advocates of video content, which can be attributed to the availability of two volunteers who were able to create and edit it. They also provided several examples of how many views videos were receiving on their channels:

*"And then C6R3 had a video there a couple of weeks ago – he actually got permission to fly his drone outside and it got a lot of views"* (C6R1).

*"Yeah it was something like 15k views in an hour."* (C6R2).

Similarly, C4' social media manager indicated that anything which wasn't just plain text would receive higher levels of engagement. In order to improve on engagement they have also started to use hashtags (the only club that mentioned this during the interviews): *"I think obviously being able to share information on social media is great. There's also the platform to share it in a different way other than just talking to somebody or texting somebody... you can use pictures, GIFs, emojis – you know try to interact... Give somebody a bit more exciting thing other than just reading what you are writing"* (C4R1).

C1's social media advisor again advocated that goals are the most popular content they notice in terms of interaction: *"They will comment for instance if a goal goes in and it's curled in from the penalty box, you will comments – 'great goal', 'fantastic'... If a player plays well or seems to play well, there's comments after the game. So there's a lot of interaction on it..."* (C1R1).

While C5's social media manager proposes that overall Facebook gets more interaction than Twitter in reference to conversations and comments (see section 7.2.5), C8's social media manager further supports the argument that images receive more engagement than text, citing that their most popular posts are match pictures. The respondent goes on to explain that anything with graphics (including the use of GIFs) gets more interaction/engagement: *"We are working on just making our graphics better because again we find posts with pictures do 10 times better than posts without. So we try to create a picture with everything we post. Our pictures, our graphics were a bit 'schoolboyish' for a while, but we are trying to get better, just improve ourselves and that"* (C8R1).

### **7.3.2. Text-based Content**

In relation to text-based content, this will be news, general information and match commentary. C4' social media manager identifies that it is necessary to provide more than just text to get engagement with social media content (see quote from C4R1 in section 7.3.1). In regards to team news, while this may be text-based, C1's social media manager also acknowledge this as a key area of engagement for their fans on social media: *"During a match there's a planned approach. Obviously the team is put up – 10, 15 minutes before kick-off. Again we've brought in...you'll probably have seen it – we have the small team lineout and we change that if it's 4-4-2 or whatever*

*formation, the players in, the subs in. So that obviously comes into it...we try and update the feed as accurately as we can” (C1R1).*

### **7.3.3. Image Content**

Images are an increasingly popular form of content for clubs to provide. The volunteers in charge of social media at the clubs are creating graphics themselves, both providing photos of the match from their phones, or through creating GIFs (C3 for example): *“Just even images of the game....nothing special – just off my phone – I have a decent camera on my phone. One of our most successful tweets - I put up a meme and it got 120 retweets so that was the most successful one. So pictures, and well one meme have been the most successful thing. The GIFs are pretty popular”* (C3R1). Multiple clubs suggest these get more interaction than text-based content (although possibly not as much as video content). C2’s social media manager notes that through not providing quality in images they may damage their brand and used this as a reason to not pursue Instagram as a social media channel (see section 7.2.8 for quote). He further acknowledges that high quality images will convey a high quality brand image, showing recognition of social media’s use as a marketing communications channel.

### **7.3.4. Video Content**

Several clubs produced video content for social media. This included match highlights, behind the scenes content and livestreaming of matches. One of the primary issues with video content was that it required a lot of time to create, an issue when clubs struggle for time (C6): *“I was here an hour and a half. The video stuff you take time to actually film what’s happening, the post editing and stuff takes about the same amount of time you spend shooting so...”* (C6R3). However, C6’s social media team also identify that it gets greater levels of engagement and can be utilised on multiple channels (see section 7.2.3). Similarly, C2’s social media manager state that when they are able to produce video content it does well (in terms of viewership and engagement): *“We don’t really have a lot of video content, but when we do have video content it works very well. We just don’t have the resources to produce a lot of video content – when we do that it certainly works well”* (C2R1).

Some clubs are attempting to start live streaming matches. However, while this provides value to fans that cannot attend the match, it may also provide fans with an alternative to paying gate receipts and could damage the attendance levels of the club. C1 are a club undertaking this: *“We now have a live video that goes out over Facebook on a - we’ve tried it out the last couple of games here which is a live feed of the match. There’s no commentary on it – it’s a live feed of the match going on which seems to be a fairly big hit now”* (C1R1).

#### **7.4. Barriers to Social Media Use**

Several barriers to effective social media use in the clubs have been identified throughout data collection. Firstly, C6’s social media team suggest that when multiple accounts are being controlled by multiple people there are clear issues with coordinating efforts to make content consistent. They, with others suggest that there can be issues with unprofessional use of social media; in other words, the content must be styled the same and individuals using the accounts must remember that they are official communications channels:

*“We would be very protective of the accounts because obviously they’re official accounts. So especially because of the blue tick and all – we have to be careful what we put on nowadays”* (C6R1).

*“In the past we’ve brought people in to do Twitter updates who were fans and they took the approach “I’m a fan I’m allowed my own say” – on the official account you can’t really have that approach”* (C6R3).

A key issue is the lack of a budget for all clubs. However, several stated that they felt social media could be used to generate a budget through sponsorship: *“Our social media – we’re updating all platforms on social media and we haven’t had anyone – now we’ve got a document this past week we’re going to try and send it around and get someone to sponsor man of the match or player of the month just so we can have – a kitty to use for various different ideas we have, or any upgrades to the camera equipment we need”* (C6R3).

C8’s social media manager stated that in order to use paid advertisements he put his own money in on behalf of the club; however, C6’s social media manager identified that he would not be willing to do this: *“The only thing that we have never used on*



*Facebook would be the ones where you get £30 credit to pay – I don't know whether it's branded content – it's like to boost your post kind of thing. We've never used that because we don't have a budget for that, it would be out of our own pocket and obviously we're not going to put it out of our own pocket to benefit the club” (C6R1).*

Several clubs also cited a lack of time as an issue, in particular when discussing the creation of image or video based content: *“We just don't have the resources to produce a lot of video content...I think time constraint, if I go back to being reactive, time is something that people don't really – there might be ideas to get off the ground, or things that people want to do, and then because of the certain reactive nature, they don't really think the whole end to end process through, and it doesn't really get fulfilled either at all, or to the best of its potential” (C2R1).*

Several clubs suggested that there was difficulty for them in analysing data and quantifying the impact of social media on attendances. Therefore they were less inclined to set specific objectives, and the boards of these clubs were less likely to realise the potential value from social media (see section 7.2.1 for evidence from C7). Lack of planning and strategy was also a barrier to effective use, as identified by C2's social media manager. Lack of planning was attributed to difficulty in analysing data and lack of time: *“There's a lot of good intention but it lacks the planning, it lacks the skillset, it lacks real strategy behind what we do at times” (C2R1).*

## **7.5. Club Social Media Value**

This section analyses the data in relation to experienced value through social media application by the clubs. The findings relate to both RO2 and RO3.

### **7.5.1. Increasing Attendance**

Many of the clubs identified that they had received increases in attendance due to using social media. A general realisation of this value has been through changes in fixtures to Friday nights. C1's social media advisor identifies a noticeable increase in attendances at matches when the day is changed and they use it for increasing attendances. He proposes that this is because of the nature of social media, and people having access to it through mobile devices (see section 7.2.1).

Clubs such as C5 are advocates of utilising social media in this way and their social media manager discusses the impact which it has. They also identify that some of their success in increasing attendances has been through continually posting information so that the audience retains the awareness of the event or match. Furthermore, through the use of events on Facebook they have gained increased awareness that has led to increased attendances: *“For example, we’ve had a couple of Friday night games recently so you do get people tagging their friends or their mates in the post when they go up. I mean the last couple of Friday night attendances have been quite big compared to what they normally would have been, so I would say that has had some sort of impact on what the attendance would have been at the games generally...there is proof that when you do try to push, do try to promote these things that it can work. Now, it’s not necessarily just posting it once or twice - you do need to almost ram it down people’s throats, but you need to make sure you keep on posting it to drum the interest up and keep it fresh in people’s minds”* (C5R1).

It has also been identified that social media causes this value; one fan of C8 stated that he would not have attended a match if he had not seen their social media content, which generated interest in attending (see section 7.2.1). C1 are the club with the most apparent impact from social media on attendances. Their social media advisor adopted social media with the main objective of increasing attendance, and suggested that it increased three to four times because of social media: *“Basically it all started to try and get interest in the club. Whenever I first got involved in the club here we didn’t have a lot of support – local support, and we wanted to sort of reach out to a younger generation* (C1R1).

This highlights the value there is for clubs if they are using it with the intent of increasing attendances. There is potential that other clubs have not realised the same benefits purely because they do not see this as a primary objective. In other words if they are not using social media and focusing on attempting to increase attendance then they will not be maximising the potential from social media. C7’s social media manager attributes the success and value of increased attendances to being able to reach wider audiences through social media than other marketing communications channels such as websites. However, while believing that they have gained increased attendances from their use of social media they also identify that it is hard to quantify exactly (see section 7.2.3 for further evidence from C7R1).

*“It’s hard to quantify that in a football stance because you don’t know how – you don’t know what your actual transaction is – you don’t know if the person coming through the gate has been attracted because they’ve been on the Facebook page – it’s hard to tell. So I think that’s probably why there’s no formalised analysis of the stats in that respect” (C7R1).*

This further links awareness to being a prerequisite for attendance. From the examples given by these clubs, awareness is needed before attendance when social media is used as the marketing communications channel, and this must be an important factor considered when developing a theoretical framework.

### **7.5.2. Raising Awareness**

Clubs have also discussed a primary value of social media as communication with their fans, and being able to make them aware of such information. Several respondents including C8’s social media manager mentioned that they struggled with this in the past, which not only was an issue for them internally, it also caused issues for fans: *“It’s the communication. I feel that it was a major complaint from all the fans for years and years and it’s the one big improvement that we have had now. We have a two way communication in the club with fans and before it was – you couldn’t imagine, no communication with them until the next match” (C8R1).* As valuable club information was being communicated through outside sources, any potential viewership that could be used in sponsorship negotiations was being lost. Now that clubs are communicating their news through official club channels they will be able to gain the benefits of this through collecting the data that is available.

Clubs have also been able to see the benefits of increased awareness through two characteristics of social media as a marketing communications channel. Firstly, information is spread at a much larger rate than through more static channels such as websites: *“Basically to get the information out quickly – there’s a lot of simple things we get, for the game tonight it’s all tickets and people want an instant reply so people don’t go elsewhere in case they don’t get the information in time” (C6R2).* This means when the club releases information that it needs fans to be aware of, there is greater likelihood that this will happen in a beneficial timeframe to the fans so greater levels of fan satisfaction are possible. Secondly, there is greater reach from social media in terms of the audience information can be communicated with: *“The fact that it*

*obviously attracts such a wide ranging audience – so people – I mean people can be attracted or have knowledge of the club that previously maybe wouldn't...it generates interest"* (C7R1). Taking a website, for example, it will most likely only reach those who are actively looking for it and therefore information will not be seen by potential consumers. However, due to information being shared among social networks of those who engage with it, any content put on these channels by the club has the potential to reach non-consumers, resulting in potential monetary value for the club.

The key value in effective communication is awareness. It is a primary value of social media, and purpose of marketing communications. From the multiple examples given, and analysis of the cases, it is apparent that awareness is a value that facilitates further forms of value. These include monetary value and fan value. Fans receive value from awareness as they can receive instant information from the club. Likewise, through raising awareness of fixture changes, the club are able to increase attendance resulting in monetary value. Because of this it could be argued that awareness is necessary for any value to be gained from social media. Therefore, while awareness is an outcome of social media content being acknowledged by fans, it is through this that other value can be seen.

### **7.5.3. Providing Fan Value**

Several clubs discussed ways in which providing value to fans over social media was their objective:

*"Interaction with the fans"* (C6R2).

*"The club's main view is to try and just – it's fan interaction really – just try and get people in, and answer people's questions. Try and show a bit of history; try to show highlights if they didn't get to the game. You know – try and give them an insight – if it's game day what's happening"* (C4R1).

Through achieving objectives, it can be said that the club has seen value from social media. However, just because it fulfils an objective it does not necessarily lead to monetary value. Achieving monetary and further value, is dependent on the content itself. For example, fans by all clubs are given match coverage and commentary through social media; this provides them with a high level of value as it is something they desire. However, the club does not receive any monetary value in return for this

information. On the other hand, if the club are able to provide content that fans engage with and interact with, this may lead to greater awareness in a wider audience, potentially leading to monetary value. Fans also gain value through direct interaction with the club, as several fans identified through the interviews. As they feel more attached to the club and have stronger levels of self-identification, they may increase their level of attendance or purchasing of club merchandise, leading to monetary value. It can also be argued that to a certain extent the provision of any information successfully to fans can be regarded as fan value, and the club still has achieved an objective and generated awareness among existing fans. Again, this may not lead to gains in monetary value, but shows value in social media as a communication channel.

#### **7.5.4. Engagement with Supporters**

Interaction and engagement can be seen as a form of fan value. However, not all fan value will result in interaction or engagement with content. Another point is that interaction and engagement isn't value for a club in and of itself; it leads to wider objectives and values being realised, such as increased awareness of the content from the club, potentially greater facilitation of revenue streams through merchandising, and higher levels of fan loyalty from existing fans. Therefore, it can be seen as a primary goal of clubs that are using social media. Many clubs did suggest that interaction was a goal or objective on social media, but many failed to see the value that lies beyond the numbers in viewership, likes or comments.

#### **7.5.5. Generating Revenue**

Several of the club representatives (C1's social media advisor and C7's social media manager) have identified that they received value from social media in terms of facilitating revenue generation outside of match attendances (see section 7.2.1 for quote from C1R1):

*“So even like using the social media to kind of advertise a sale that you have on your online shop or whatever, it's going to up your conversion – it certainly won't hurt matters if it's done right” (C7R1).*

C1 in particular were able to open a club shop through their use of social media: *“We have a website and we have an actual shop – online shop that sells well, because we*

*do have supporters from all over the world – guys who came from C1 originally”* (C1R1). C3’s social media manager states that they have seen promotions regarding facilities at the stadium, such as the social club benefit from social media use. C2’s social media manager feels that have been underachieving in terms of revenue facilitation through social media. They propose that the club need better strategy and know-how in order to fully exploit the opportunities regarding commercial offerings social media provides: *“They’re quite particular at the minute about doing that. They like to advertise the social club offers on the main page, whereas I argue that the Reds by the Minute account should be a match day experience like 9am to 9pm...so that is definitely something I would like to get in and, you know, entice people down with offers”* (C3R1). In addition, C6’s social media team have advocated that social media will provide them with the ability to generate their own sponsorships to create a marketing budget for further use on social media: *“Now we’ve got a document this past week we’re going to try and send it around and get someone to sponsor man of the match or player of the month just so we can have – a kitty to use for various different ideas we have, or any upgrades to the camera equipment we need”* (C6R3).

#### **7.5.6. Targeting a Specific Demographic**

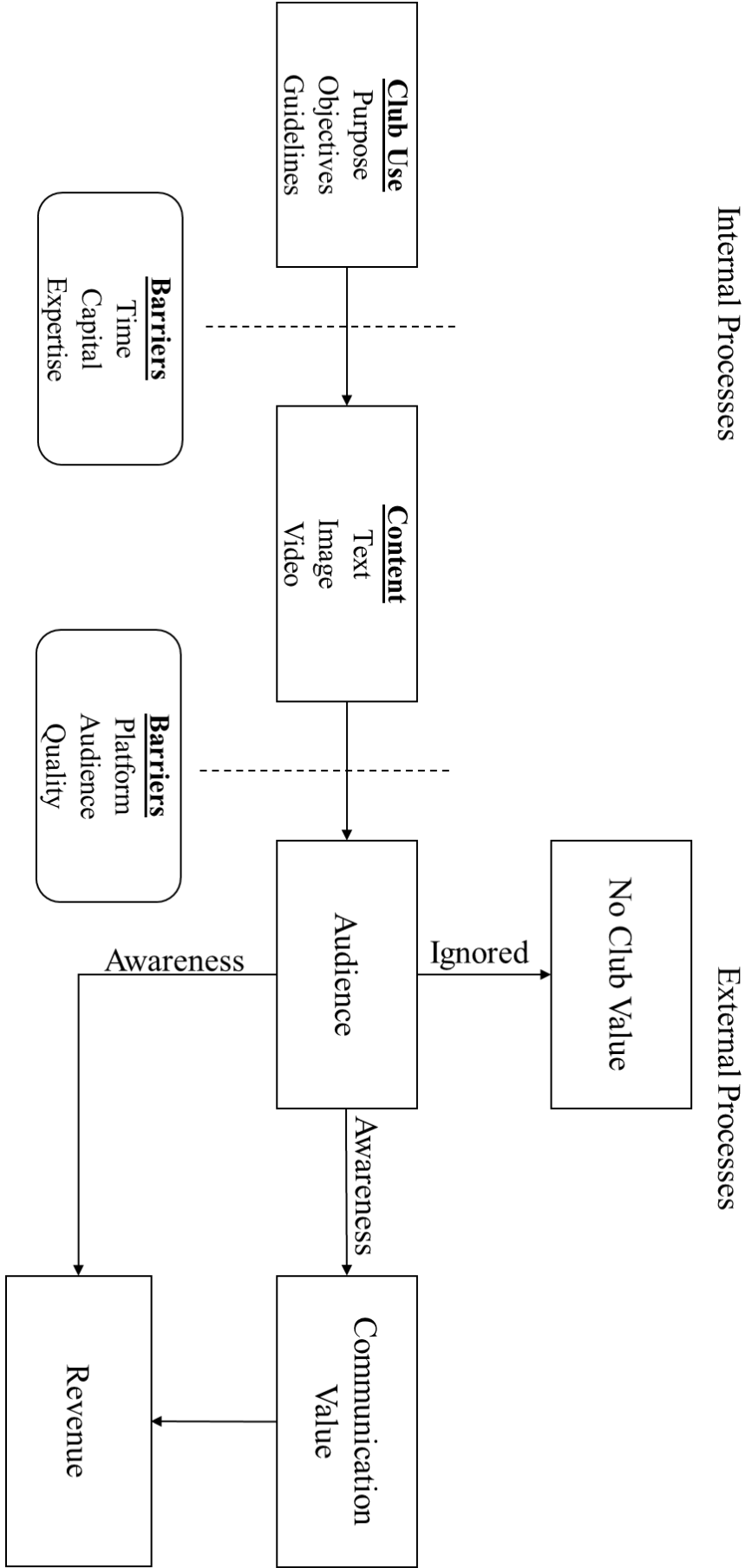
C1 and C7 representatives stated that an advantage of using social media was that the club would be able to target a younger demographic. C1 desired a younger fan base, and got this through their marketing on social media. They state that their attendance increased three to four times what it had been eight years ago, providing evidence that suggests they were able to achieve this objective (quote presented in section 7.3.6.1). C7’s social media manager also identifies that social media can be used to target younger audiences; however, it is identified that while the majority of young people (no specific age range given) are on social media, there is still a wide range of ages using it (quote presented in section 7.2.1).

#### **7.6. Model Illustrating Social Media Use in SSCs**

From RO2 we can show the process of social media’s use as a marketing communications channel in clubs, and the key factors that have an impact on this (figure 7.2). There are two main sections: internal, club-controlled factors, and

external factors related to audience perception. RO3 will focus on analysing the gaps between current application and best practice within the clubs.

Figure 7.2 – Social Media Use in SSCs





### **7.6.1. Club Use of Social Media**

The purpose behind using social media in the club may change and will consequently have an impact on the content that is created, which will lead to a different perception and reaction from the audience. It also incorporates potential guidelines from the club on how social media should be used, as these will affect all subsequent actions and reactions on social media channels.

### **7.6.2. Social Media Content**

The content follows club use, and highlights whether the content is text-based, image, or video. Content can also have characteristics such as being interactive or engaging, as many of the clubs identified there are differences between engaging and non-engaging content. Therefore, if a club knows how to create content that is engaging, it may or may not choose to do so here. This is in control of the club, and is part of the decision making process that occurs when using social media strategically. They must identify how to achieve the purpose or objective they have in using social media at this point, again within their resource limitations.

### **7.6.3. Internal Barriers to Social Media Use**

The barriers internal to the club will have a direct impact on its ability to both determine and define objectives relating to social media use, and then to the type of content that is created for fans. These barriers include limited capital, reducing the ability for things such as paid advertising. In addition to this there are also limitations regarding the use of volunteers such as time, as they will have other commitments, and limited experience as they may not be from a marketing background. These will have impacts on the ability to plan ahead, and to provide effective content in regards to achieving the set objectives.

### **7.6.4. Audience Perception and Potential Value**

If the content from the clubs is acknowledged by the audience, it may result in one or more of the factors of value that clubs identified during the research. This could be increased awareness, fan satisfaction or fan engagement with the content. Through fan engagement, there is scope for the content to reach a wider audience resulting in

greater awareness. Ultimately the goal for the club should be to receive monetary value, through attendance, greater brand awareness or facilitation of alternative revenue streams. If the content is ignored by the audience then no club value will have been received.

#### **7.6.5. External Barriers to Social Media Use**

There are several barriers that will affect how the content is perceived by the audience. Firstly, there is a chance that the platform will impact on how the fans perceive value in the content. Some clubs identified that different forms of engagement happen on a more frequent basis depending on what social media platform was used. If the audience also do not perceive the content as great quality this will have an impact on how much value the club can receive. If the audience is not large enough there may also be limitations to how much engagement a post can get, resulting in less overall value. This is why C8 in particular suggested that they wanted to grow their audience on Facebook.

#### **7.7. Overview of Key Findings from Research Stage Two**

The key findings relating to research stage two, which address RO2 and RO3 are summarised here. Clubs recognised that social media could be used to increase attendances. Several clubs also discussed using social media to facilitate additional revenue streams. Therefore, SSCs recognise the financial potential from social media. All clubs identified that the primary purpose of their social media use as raising awareness and communicating with fans. The clubs also indicated that they used social media to engage with fans.

There were limited guidelines in place within clubs. A limited social media policy was considered to have negative consequences. Additionally, a lack of planning and strategy was apparent in most clubs. Several discussed having a schedule, but little on setting objectives and utilising social media to achieve these. Clubs identified that image and video content received more engagement from fans in general. Several identified limited resources constrained their ability to provide this. Key barriers to social media use in clubs were: coordination between team members, lack of budget, lack of time, lack of strategy, and difficulty in analysing data/measuring impact. Clubs suggested that the key values they saw in social media were: increasing attendance,

generating awareness, providing fan value, engaging with fans, and being able to target a younger demographic.

A model highlighting the social media use in clubs was generated to show the overall process. It shows club purpose of social media, internal barriers, social media content, external barriers, and the potential value (financial and communicative) when content reaches its audience.

<b>Key Findings from Club Respondent Interviews</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Club respondents recognised the financial potential of social media.</li> <li>• Limited guidelines and a lack of objectives were evident within clubs, which restricted strategic use of social media.</li> <li>• Several key limitations to social media application in clubs were identified: coordination, budget, strategy and planning development, and difficulty in measuring the impact of social media.</li> <li>• Key social media value for clubs were identified: raising attendance, raising awareness of the club, and engaging with fans.</li> <li>• A model was developed, illustrating key factors, processes, and outcomes involved in social media application within SSCs: figure 7.2.</li> </ul>

**Table 7.1 – Overview of Key Findings from Club Respondent Interviews.**

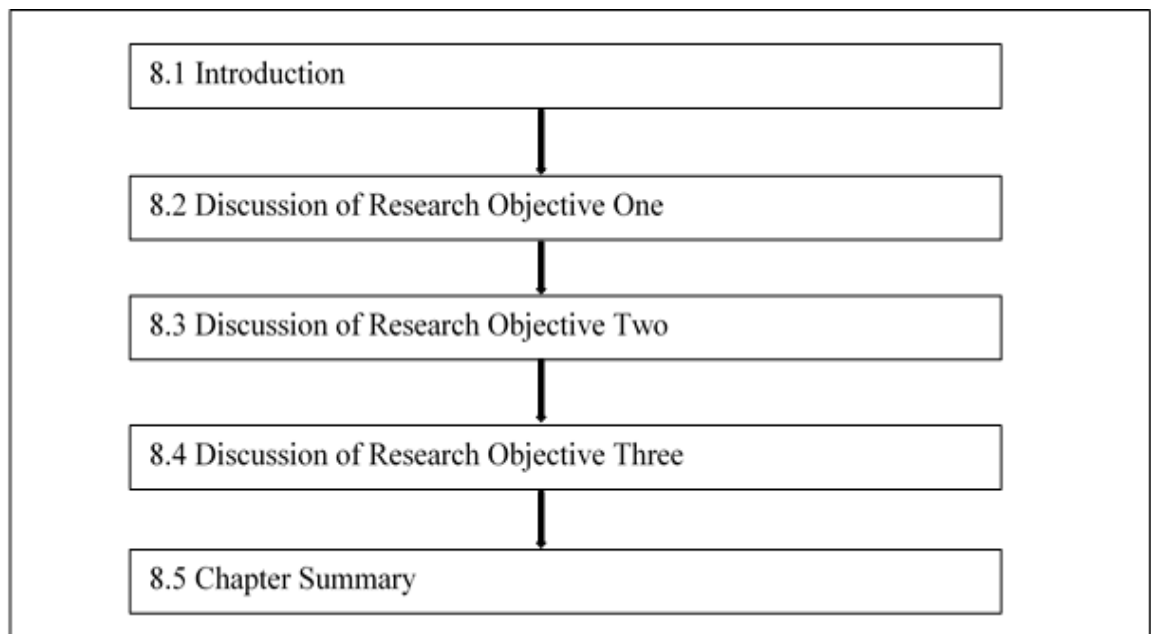
## **7.8. Chapter Summary**

Within this chapter an analysis of research stage two was presented, which consisted of a cross-case analysis of club representative perspectives regarding social media use. A model identifying the current application process of social media in SSCs was developed to highlight objectives, barriers and values that are experienced. In the following chapter, the findings and their analysis will be discussed in relation to literature, to meet RO3, where an identification of the gaps between current application and best practice are presented. This will also satisfy the overall research aim through the development of a strategic framework regarding the facilitation of value co-creation in SSCs between the club and its fans.

## **8.0. CHAPTER EIGHT: Discussion**

### **8.1. Introduction**

This chapter will discuss the findings and analysis of findings in relation to relevant literature. The purpose of this study was to identify how social media can be used to co-create value between a sports organisation and its fans via social media, as this is an efficient way to communicate with fans in the context of semi-professional sport. RO1 is discussed, with the process of fan engagement and decision making highlighted. Following this, club value of social media related to RO2 is discussed with reference to literature on the topic area. RO3 discusses barriers between current and best practice in relation to social media application in SSCs. A strategic framework is presented highlighting SSC application of social media, and the potential financial and marketing value of effective use of social media channels. The structure of this chapter is presented in figure 8.1.



**Figure 8.1 – Discussion Chapter Structure**

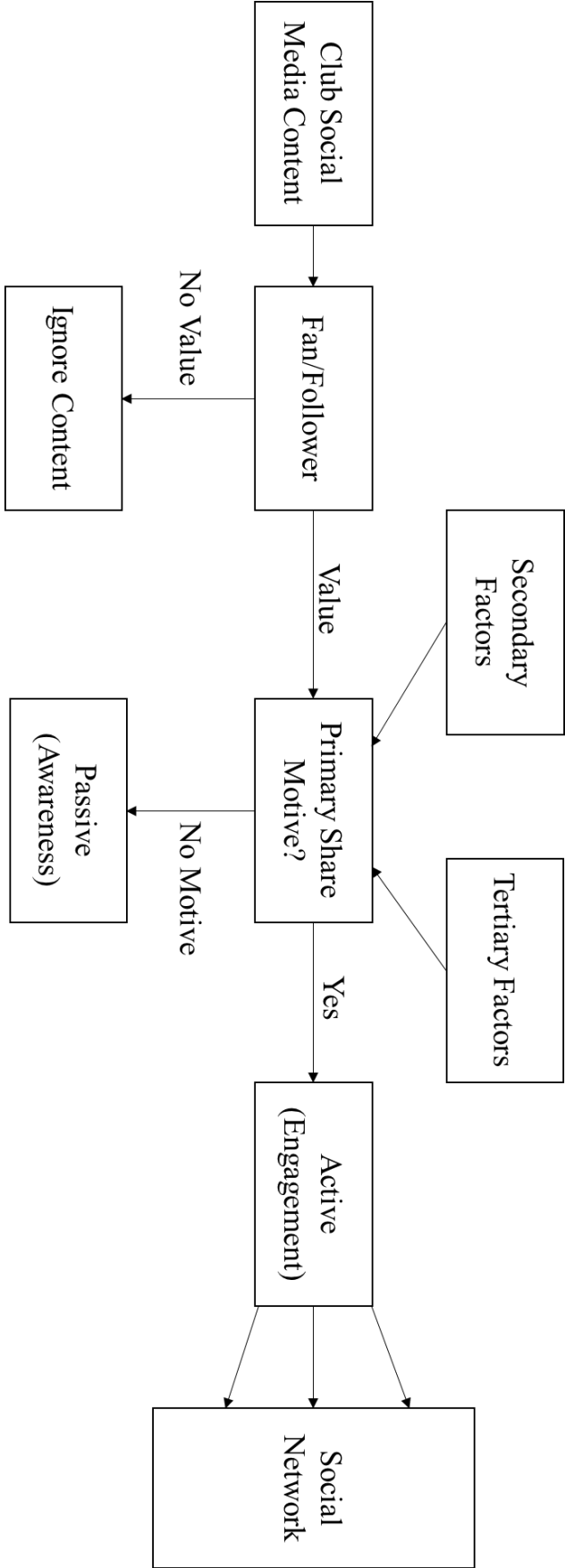
### **8.2. Discussion of Research Objective One**

*RO1: To evaluate the motivations of fans in their engagement with content from a SSC's social media communication.*

The purpose of RO1 was to evaluate the motivations for fans of SSCs to engage with social media content. Through presentation and analysis of the findings in chapters

fix, six, and seven, a model highlighting the decision making process of fans for social media engagement was developed (figure 8.2). In the following section this will be discussed with reference to existing literature to highlight the significance of these findings as a contribution to knowledge, and to further explain the key features of the proposed model. Literature will be used to evaluate the values identified in the research and to discuss their relevance to the overall research aim.

Figure 8.2 - Fan Decision Making Process to Engage with Social Media Content in SSCs



### **8.2.1. Social Media Value**

A number of values relating to the experience of sports fans on social media were identified and analysed from the data collected. Ultimately, value must be present in some form for any engagement to occur. The model identifies that if there is no value, the content itself will be ignored. Following this, several levels of motivation and mediating factors must be considered as part of the engagement process. If value is experienced, the social media content will not be ignored; instead, the individual will enter into a decision-making process regarding whether or not to engage with the content.

Value in itself needs to be understood in the context being discussed (Horbel et al., 2016). This means that the values experienced by sports consumers on social media need to be identified within the context of semi-professional sport as value co-creation is context specific. Lee and Lee (2017) also identify that interactions on social media have a direct influence on personal connection with a brand, and the usage intention of the individual. In other words, if value is experienced on social media it will lead to an increased likelihood of engagement. Based upon the findings of this study, value on social media is a necessity in order for any engagement to be undertaken. The resultant engagement may lead to further value experienced by a fan.

Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) and Song and Yoo (2016) identify functional, social, psychological and hedonic value that can be experienced on social media. Kang (2011) adds monetary value to this. Psychological benefits are related to the sense of belonging and attachment that can be experienced through social media. The terminology used in this research is symbolic, as it better represents how the value is experienced by the sports fan, as self-identification and other forms of value are used by the fan for symbolic meaning. Both social and hedonic values have also been identified within this research which is consistent with the findings of Wang and Fesenmaier (2004). Although these values have been identified in a general context, they have not been discussed in the context of sport and social media, and as previously highlighted, value is context-specific. Therefore, it is still an important finding that these values are experienced by sports consumers through social media.

While identified by Song and Yoo (2016) that functional benefits were to include sharing and exchanging of information, this research shows that functional value in social media extends beyond this to the value that content itself can provide. In other words, the content provides value such as information or awareness that is used by the individual accessing it. Furthermore, the category of functional value can include monetary value identified by Kang (2011), as it is argued that saving money or financial gain (through competitions) on social media is a function. Additionally, this research has identified an extra category of value not discussed within the context of social media and sport: experiential value. These experiential values are unique to the individual, and the working definition for this category is value which is experienced by an individual, is intangible and cannot be compared with the experience of others. The four values within this category that were identified were ‘hype’, ‘interesting’, ‘quality’, and ‘timeliness’. The working definition for this category highlights that one individual may not measure ‘quality’ of content in the same manner as another, and therefore comparisons cannot be directly drawn between individuals. This category of values is incomplete as only a small sample of fans were studied. Through a larger study, more categories would be identified and more in-depth conclusions could be drawn as to the importance of these values in relation to potential engagement.

### **8.2.2. Primary Motives to Engage with Social Media Content**

From the research, three categories of primary motivation were identified that encourage a fan to engage with social media content. These are self-interest motivations, cooperative motivations and altruistic motivations. These motivations can be related to purpose for engagement. In other words the primary motives for engagement must be present in order for engagement to be undertaken. This differs from secondary motives which describe the content and its characteristics that encourage or discourage engagement, and from tertiary factors that mediate the engagement decision-making process. This research also found that primary motivations were conscious decisions made by individuals in relation to purpose or intent to engage with content; therefore, values were consequences or emotional responses to content.



#### **8.2.2.1. Self-interest Motives to Engage with Social Media Content**

The category of self-interest as a motivation to engage contains several sub-themes. These are achievement, personal image, and competition. This research defines the category of self-interest motivates for engagement as a desire to provide benefit to oneself through engagement with social media content. Engagement with the underlying motive of self-interest will result predominantly in personal value and benefit being experienced.

One aspect of self-interest that motivated fans to engage with social media content was a sense of vicarious achievement. This is similar to BIRGing and CORFing as previously identified as values of social media. However, the key difference is that BIRGing and CORFing were possible to achieve without engagement. In fact CORFing is not at all associated with engaging with social media content from a club due to the desired to be 'cut off' from poor results. While BIRGing is a motivation for engagement, it too differs from the value experienced on social media by fans. As a value, BIRGing is an experience and a form of vicarious achievement. However, it alone does not motivate the engagement with content. Also, the engagement with content to experience vicarious achievement is a conscious decision made by an individual; in the case of experienced value, it is a consequence of loyalty.

Similar to experiencing vicarious achievement, personal image was classed as a primary motivation for social media users in semi-professional sport. It is closely related to experienced values of self-identification with the club. Personal image was a primary motivation due to the desire for content that an individual engaged with to reflect their identity. An interesting point was the recognition of potential negative impacts from sharing social media content on personal image. Therefore, while personal image can be a positive primary motivation to engage with content; in order to portray a positive image of oneself, it can also act as a mediating factor whereby engagement with potentially negative content will be avoided.

#### **8.2.2.2. Cooperative Motives to Engage with Social Media Content**

Cooperative motivations for engaging with social media content focus on potential value gained through interaction originating from the engagement. This research defines cooperative motives as motivation to engage with content that will facilitate

interaction with one or more other individuals. In relation to interaction, this is interaction facilitated between individuals or groups of fans, and not interaction from the club which is more closely related to attachment and self-identification values than motivations to engage. Engagement based on the underlying motive of cooperation will most commonly result in social values being experienced.

#### **8.2.2.3. Altruistic Motives to Engage with Social Media Content**

This research defines altruistic motivations for social media engagement as those engagements which are undertaken to provide value to others through the dissemination of information. This does not mean that personal value is not experienced through the engagement; instead, the focus is on helping others. Therefore, personal value may also be experienced through one of the five categories identified: functional, hedonic, symbolic, social, or experiential. Engagement undertaken through altruistic motives will most often result in symbolic value for the individual. This is because the individual will be seen to be knowledgeable around a particular subject, or their loyalty to a club may be promoted through the engagement.

Oh and Syn (2015) have identified that in general social media use, altruism is a factor influencing motivation of social media users to engage with content. An interesting finding from their research is that the motivation of altruistic tendencies varied based on the social media platform used. While they identify altruism as one of ten factors involved in engagement motivations, it is in general social media use and not that of sport. Altruism was based on a user searching for information to answer the question of another without expecting value or a reward in return (Oh and Syn, 2015). This differs from the context of sport, whereby it is argued that altruism is a primary motivation for engagement due to the loyalty shown to a sports club by followers and fans, and their wish to help provide value to others without being prompted to do so.

#### **8.2.3. Secondary Motives to Engage with Social Media Content**

Secondary motives identified from the research are not an exhaustive list. A larger sample size would most likely yield greater descriptions of content type on social media, due to differences in personal preference and vocabulary. However, they are all consistent in that they are descriptions of the content itself and the emotional response people have to it.

The nature of personal interpretation of content is highlighted through the descriptions of content as ‘interesting’ and ‘unique’ by individuals. These are two categories that highlight the difficulties in identifying all possible descriptions that fans could use for secondary motives. These motives can be more closely linked to value experienced from content that elicits an emotional response from an individual. Personal interest was identified as a cooperative form of primary motivation; however, in this instance the content may not be used for cooperative purposes. Instead, it is possible that personal interest has elicited engagement to portray a desired personal image of oneself on social media, a form of self-interest as a primary motive. This example highlights that while personal interest is a sub-category of cooperative motivation to engage, it differs from content that is interesting. This is because primary motives are the underlying intent for engagement, while secondary motives are emotional responses to content that encourage engagement. Additionally, Popp and Woratschek (2016) identify that within the context of sport and brand communities, involvement or topic interest is likely to increase levels of engagement, thus supporting these findings.

Several of the secondary motives for engagement that were identified could be related to entertainment as a consequential value. For example, fans describing content as exciting or fun that motivated them to engage could suggest that entertainment was experienced. Kunz et al. (2016) argue that the integration of entertainment into marketing strategy from an organisation’s perspective can lead to increased customer attention and engagement; two key objectives of social media marketing in SSCs. Entertainment is also a form of altruism discussed as a primary motivation for engaging. In this instance, the belief would be that others would find the content entertaining; whereas as a secondary motive, entertainment is value experienced, leading to an emotive reaction by the individual that encourages engagement.

A point raised by Blasco-Arcas et al., (2016) is that customer emotions have a mediating impact on customer response in social media engagements. This means that an emotional response to content on social media will have an impact on the likelihood of an individual engaging with the content. While the identified motives in this research are not pleasure, arousal or dominance as noted by Blasco-Arcas et al., (2016), they fit within the category of a pleasurable emotional reaction. Therefore, it can also be said that positive emotional response to social media content is more likely

to lead to engagement with it. Cabosky (2016) also furthers this proposal by identifying that positive opinions are shared more commonly on social media as opposed to negative opinions. Hussein and Hassan (2017) similarly identify several factors impacting on consumer attitudes toward social media, and draw conclusions linking a positive attitude or association with content and increased engagement. This is in line with the research findings, as these secondary motives are most commonly related to positivity, supporting the argument that secondary motives increase the likelihood of engagement with social media content.

#### **8.2.4. Tertiary Motives to Engage with Social Media Content**

Tertiary motives are the underlying factors of social media use that act as mediators to whether or not an individual will be likely to engage with content. These differ from primary motivations, which must be present for engagement to occur, and from secondary motivations, which describe the emotive response to social media content from a personal perspective. Tertiary factors include the platform that the content is on (Facebook or Twitter, for example), and an individual's typical social media behaviour; whether or not engagement is a regular occurrence.

##### **8.2.4.1. Social Media Platform**

The social media platform acts as a mediating factor of social media engagement for several reasons. Firstly, the characteristics of the platform itself may result in 'ease-of-engagement', whereby features are present on the platform that encourage behaviour such as sharing of content. Secondly, the platform may be frequented more by users that are more likely to engage with content. In other words a platform such as Twitter or Facebook may be more commonly utilised in a particular sport, increasing the likelihood of engagement on the platform. Blasco-Arcas et al., (2016) propose that further to this, platforms will have an ultimate impact on transactional intentions and not just likelihood for engagement, highlighting important practical implications for SSCs. Cabosky (2016) also supports the findings by stating that the social media platform had a direct impact on the level of engagement content received. Furthermore, Oh and Syn (2015) analysed the impacts of multiple engagement motivations across five social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Their findings identified that motivations to engage differed across each of

these platforms. Therefore this highlights that social media platform mediates the impact of other motivations; while they may provide purpose or intent for engagement, the channel will have an impact on this decision in a different manner.

#### **8.2.4.2. Typical Social Media Behaviour**

A key mediating factor in the likelihood for sports fans to engage with social media content identified through this research was the typical behaviour on social media of the individual. The two categories that emerged from the findings were active and passive users of social media, where active users typically engaged with or created content on a frequent basis, and passive users typically just consumed content with only occasional interaction. Cabosky (2016) also identifies several factors that distinguished individuals from being 'sharers' or 'non-sharers'. This research argues that an individual who would be categorised as a 'non-sharer' could be motivated under certain circumstances to engage with content. Because of this, typical social media behaviour is categorised as a mediating factor along with the social media platform. Duffett (2017) also argues that individuals who engage more commonly with content are more likely to do so in the future, suggesting that this becomes a behavioural trait over time.

#### **8.2.5. Theoretical Implications**

There are several key theoretical implications based on this discussion of findings regarding RO1. This research contributes significantly to the understanding of value co-creation from a consumer's perspective in sport. The study provides evidence of the key factors in facilitating value co-creation on social media. Previous research has identified the values that fans experience through social media use. In addition to identifying social media values, this research shows that it is necessary for value to be experienced by a sports fan prior to the potential for engagement. In other words, without value a sports fan will not engage with social media content. Furthermore, value itself does not equate to engagement without the recognition of other motives. This leads to the realisation that a decision-making process exists as to whether sports consumers will engage with content on social media. This is a key finding not only in sport, but also in a wider context. Engagement is seen as core to value co-creation, as

it is where interaction between club and fan occurs. An evaluation of the factors necessary for this to occur was provided.

While motives have previously been identified for engagement by other authors, no known research has presented this in the context of a process with multiple contributing and mediating factors impacting upon behavioural outcomes. Future research could investigate if the discovered factors are consistent in wider contexts outside of sport. This research identified three forms of primary motivation to engage: self-interest, cooperative, and altruism. The identification of primary motives for engagement in sport is important as it highlights the initial prerequisites for engagement. These clarify the purpose by which an individual will engage; without purpose, engagement and ultimately value co-creation will not occur. It also noted the emotional response to content acted as a secondary motive for engagement. Finally, this research identified that both the social media platform and typical social media behaviour acted as mediating factors in a decision to engage with social media content from sports consumers. Secondary and tertiary motives encourage or discourage engagement; however, they are not solely responsible for engagement.

#### **8.2.6. Practical Implications**

There are multiple practical implications derived from findings relating to RO1. A key implication is the need for marketing managers in SSCs to ensure that content is providing value to fans. While there are multiple forms of value identified in this research, it may not be a complete list of themes due to the sample size given that this was qualitative case research. Value is necessary as a first step prior to engagement decisions being made by sports consumers; if it is not present, no engagement will occur and thus no value will be experienced by the club. Additionally, if strategies are being employed with a focus on engagement, then they must provide content to fans that can facilitate the primary motives to engage, while simultaneously promoting a message that fits their objectives. In other words, if a club aims to engage its fans on social media, it must provide content that meets the criteria for engagement (primary motives), while also providing a marketing message that will result in value for the club (e.g. to increase brand awareness). As secondary motives for engagement are based on emotional response to content, marketing managers should utilise feedback and data made available through social media in order to better gauge these responses.

This will help the clubs provide content that more effectively leads to engagement. Moreover, this data can be used to help judge best which social media platforms lead to higher levels of engagement, impacting on strategic decision making regarding social media marketing.

### **8.3. Discussion of Research Objective Two**

*RO2: To evaluate the perceived value of social media use and application as a marketing communications channel from the SSC's perspective.*

The purpose of RO2 was to identify value of social media from the perspective of SSCs. Through identification of the value that clubs were realising and aimed to achieve, the basis for a strategic framework could be developed that allowed a more effective approach to marketing through social media. This section discusses both value and potential value that SSCs can achieve through social media application.

#### **8.3.1. Club Values**

Several values from the perspective of sports clubs were identified in the findings. It was important to identify value within this context as it is necessary to understand value in context for strategic benefit (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Horbel et al., 2016). In other words, it is necessary to understand what values clubs wish to realise from social media use as a marketing communications channel in order to develop a strategic framework to achieve this in an effective manner. These values are related to typical marketing communications objectives in organisations, such as awareness and data collection. There are ultimate goals of revenue generation that are also identified and discussed.

##### **8.3.1.1. Attendance and Revenue**

Two key areas of value for clubs from using social media were attendance and consequential revenue. These can be categorised as financial value, and the majority of clubs discussed how they either experienced this through social media, or saw potential in the use of social media as a marketing communications channel in order to realise this value. The potential for this in social media has been researched by Broekemier et al. (2015) who argues that consumers who engage with organisations via social media are more likely to have increased levels of interest in their products

and/or services, ultimately leading to increased likelihood of transactions. This is of key importance to SSCs who aim to develop as businesses through adoption of commercial logic (Enjolras, 2002). This has also been recognised in sport, as value co-creation on social media can lead to increased brand loyalty, which will lead to increased consumption levels from existing consumers or fans benefitting the organisation (Popp and Woratschek, 2016).

#### **8.3.1.2. Awareness**

A key outcome and objective of marketing communications is in awareness of brand and product or service offering. All clubs identified the value of social media in increasing awareness of their organisation to current fans, and among less loyal consumers or non-consumers that their organisation existed. Brand awareness is a key objective for developing SSCs as they aim to increase attendances at matches. Funk and James (2006) identify that awareness is the first stage in developing attraction and attachment to a sports organisation. Therefore, it can be argued that this is a vital first step in increasing attendance from non-consumers. Broekemier et al. (2015) discusses the value of social media in increasing levels of awareness of an organisation. This view is supported by Cawsey and Rowley (2016) who argue that brand awareness is an outcome of successful social media application, and a further consequence is an improved brand image. Laurell and Söderman (2018) argue that it is important for clubs to manage the story being told on social media, as this will have implications of both awareness levels and the brand image that is portrayed.

#### **8.3.1.3. Data Analytics**

Feedback and analysis of received marketing data is a key area of value that is made readily available through the interactive nature of social media. Nguyen (2015) highlights that customer needs can be identified more effectively through social media than traditional marketing communications channels. Several clubs discussed the value of data that was available to them; however, they identified key limitations regarding the expertise required to make best use of this. Rathore et al. (2016) also argue that feedback gained from social media can be used to improve the service offering to consumers. With a strategic framework to identify the usefulness of the



available data in social media, clubs may be more likely to use this to improve their marketing communications and value co-creation efforts via social media channels.

#### **8.3.1.4. Fan Value and Engagement**

An area of value outside the remit of traditional marketing communications channels that clubs identified as purpose and value for social media use was to provide value and engagement to fans. At a superficial level this does not appear to be a business or marketing-related objective of SSCs. However, this research argues that co-creation through engagement on social media with fans is the most effective way social media can be utilised as a marketing communications channel. Cawsey and Rowley (2016) propose that social media is an effective way to increase engagement with consumers, which supports this argument. Furthermore, Kao et al (2016) identify that organisations outside of sport, utilise social media to co-create value with consumers, a view also noted by Dolan et al. (2016). Therefore, clubs are recognising the value of engagement, and are utilising social media as a platform to do so. However, there is no clear strategic framework for social media use in this manner in SSCs. Without an underlying strategy, it is likely SSCs will not realise this value to its full potential.

#### **8.3.2. Marketing Communications Value**

A core aspect of marketing communications is the value of engagement that is possible through social media. Two-way communication has multiple benefits for organisations, and this research shows that engagement can be strategically achieved through acknowledgement of the factors involved. A key area necessary for this engagement is in developing a positive consumer attitude towards the organisation (Hussein and Hassan, 2017). A positive attitude towards a sports organisation is more likely to come from fans exhibiting higher levels of affective or behavioural loyalty, as identified through the conceptual model prior to empirical research. Engagement is not necessarily value for an organisation in and of itself; it results in consequential value of improved brand value and transactional values for the organisation, as shown through the strategic framework (Fig. 8.3). However, Blasco-Arcas et al., (2016) propose that engagement is the origin of non-transactional responses among consumers such as improved brand image, and will lead to improved purchase

intentions. Therefore, this research claims that engagement is a necessary step in the co-creation of value on social media.

Engagement on social media leads to brand value through improved awareness, reputation and image. Kumar et al. (2017) note that there is synergy existing between traditional marketing communications and social media. This highlights that the outcomes of strategic marketing can be consistently achieved on social media. In other words, strategic marketing to improve brand value can be achieved through social media as it has been through traditional marketing communications channels. Cawsey and Rowley (2016) support this, by identifying that social media can be used to improve the brand image of an organisation through utilisation of consumer engagement.

Several authors contend that the value in social media and its improvement of brand value are all related to engagement. Gorgani (2016) argues that seeing a peer's opinion of certain content through their engagement with it, will have a subsequent impact on the individual's perception of it. In other words, seeing someone's opinion of something on social media will influence others' opinion of it. This has the impact of generating brand awareness, developing attraction or interest, and ultimately influencing the brand value through social media content. Fisher (2015) adds to this by stating that this form of value on social media is generated based on two key factors: the influence an individual engaging with content has as a brand ambassador, and their social media network through which the information is disseminated. In other words both influence and reach of an individual have an impact on potential value the organisation or club will experience through social media. This is an area for future research to develop the strategic framework further. Future research should focus on identifying how much impact these two factors have within the context of sport, and if there is a way to exploit opportunities presented through this knowledge strategically.

### **8.3.3. Financial Value**

This research identifies that the financial value from using social media as a marketing communications channel is a necessary step for the development of SSCs. Stander and de Beer (2016) propose that commercial growth of a sports organisation is a direct consequence of engagement from the fans. This supports the research findings, by

highlighting that engagement itself, the core of value co-creation leads to commercial growth. Social media also has the potential to generate financial value. Xie and Lee (2015) identify that effective social media activity from an organisation has a significant positive effect on the likelihood of consumers to purchase brands. This supports the research by acknowledging that social media must be used effectively to fully realise the potential values available. Kumar et al. (2017) also note that social media has an impact on sales. Attendance and merchandising are two primary revenue streams for SSCs; therefore, social media has an important part to play in the commercial development of the organisation.

Gorgani (2016) recognises the impact of brand awareness and image that come with effective social media use as an important step in improved commercialisation of organisations. The effective use of social media as a marketing communications channel will improve customer attitude towards the organisation resulting in increased sales. Blasco-Arcas et al., (2016) support this point by noting that transactional intention can originate on social media, and its use can have a positive impact on these intentions. This research identifies the process by which social media can be used, and the factors that will influence positive consumer attitudes. Kumar et al. (2016) and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) both note the forms of social media content that impact on sales. Kumar et al. (2016) states that firm-generated content (FGC) will have a positive impact on sales, supporting the point made that the strategic use of social media will result in financial gains by organisations. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) note that user-generated content (UGC) has a greater impact on purchase intention. However, as discussed previously, UGC cannot be strategically managed and therefore cannot be considered a core aspect of value co-creation in a strategic manner. Clubs may be able to strategically make use of it when available; however, due to its nature being reliant on user creation, this will not be consistent.

#### **8.3.4. Consequences for Fan Loyalty**

This research identifies that co-creation will lead to improved fan loyalty as mutual value is experienced from engagement with the club. This loyalty consequentially leads to increased engagement, improving the value of social media exponentially when an approach to co-creation is taken. Lee and Lee (2017) support this argument by stating that interaction with a brand improves personal connection, and increases

usage intention. In other words, effective social media use generating engagement will increase loyalty to the brand, and increased value for the club. Kilgour et al. (2015) further this by noting that increased loyalty consequently leads to more likely engagement, and ultimately has an influence on both personal connection with the club and brand usage intention. Another area to note is that involvement in the category (i.e. sport) will also increase engagement levels and fan loyalty (Kilgour et al., 2015). Stander and de Beer (2016) also argues that higher levels of engagement in sport are seen from those who both use social media more actively and are part of supporters groups. This research has identified that level of behavioural loyalty in relation to match attendance does not have a direct impact on the likelihood of social media engagement. This is a finding that requires further investigation in future quantitative research that is statistically representative, in order for conclusions to be drawn. Social media has a direct link to loyalty in football, highlighting that the improvement of fan loyalty through engagement is possible (Wulf et al., 2017).

This research proposes that the development of increased loyalty from fans through social media use can be recognised as club value, and therefore value is co-created. This is supported both from findings and other authors who raise similar points. Kilgour et al. (2015) discuss that communication with fans via social media is necessary for the development of a successful marketing strategy. Therefore, targeting engagement as proposed by the strategic framework is how value can be co-created as both club and fans experience value through increased fan loyalty. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) also argue that engagement increases levels of fan loyalty, further adding to the findings. This research builds on the findings of these authors by providing a framework that recognises the factors and characteristics to be considered for social media strategy development in sport. Ultimately, engagement on social media has the impact of moving fans along the loyalty ladder exhibited in the conceptual model which is a key target and value for SSCs.

### **8.3.5. Theoretical Implications**

The key theoretical implications regarding RO2 are the identification of club values: the identification of requirements for strategic value co-creation from a sports organisation; and the gap between current and best practice, justifying the need for a strategic framework. This research has provided significant insight into the

characteristics of SSCs as organisations through their social media application. Limitations on strategy development and planning are key issues within clubs. Evidence supporting the existence of these issues provides justification of the claim that SSCs operate under unique circumstances. Expected similarities with SME marketing were also proven through this research. In relation to limitations, a key finding regarding all clubs was the issue of time management. This validates the need in SSCs for an efficient approach to marketing that results in mutual value experienced with their fans. Furthermore, the need for an updated definition for SSCs was also justified, as clubs discussed their intentions for commercial and professional development. They also provided examples of utilising social media for this purpose.

The identification of value for a SSC on social media highlights the importance of value co-creation as an approach, as brand management and brand equity are potential values for the SSC. By addressing RO2, value co-creation theory in sport was expanded through identification of key values desired by clubs at a semi-professional level. These values can result from social media engagement, illustrating the importance of value co-creation on social media for SSCs. The key themes identified from RO2 in the research will aid in the development of a strategic framework, highlighting the overall process of value co-creation on social media within SSCs.

#### **8.3.6. Practical Implications**

The empirical research has identified multiple practical implications for marketing managers in sports organisations. Firstly, there is an identification of key areas for improvement in social media marketing. One aspect of this is the necessity for the preparation of guidelines for social media use in SSCs. This will help in overcoming some limitations regarding the lack of marketing expertise and knowledge among volunteers in SSCs. Therefore, it will limit potential drawbacks caused by the lack of expertise, as volunteers will have a structure to follow when using social media. Additionally, marketing managers should also utilise feedback and data that is made available through the use of social media as a marketing communications channel. Secondly, there is an identification for marketing managers of areas for improvement in relation to existing best practice in a wider context compared to sport. Through more effective use of social media as a marketing communications channel, there are greater benefits identified for SSCs. This justifies the need for a framework to aid in strategy

development, and to help develop a strategic approach to value co-creation through social media.

#### **8.4. Discussion of Research Objective Three**

*RO3: To compare fans' and SSCs' perspectives regarding social media use to identify causes and barriers to co-creating value on social media between fans and clubs.*

The purpose of RO3 was to evaluate current practice of social media to identify barriers to proactive or effective social media application. The first step in meeting this objective was to identify barriers to social media use within SSCs. Following this, a discussion relating to both realised and potential value from social media related to existing literature was undertaken. This discussion identified gaps between current and best practice, highlighting the potential within SSCs for an approach to social media application that focuses on co-creating value with fans. A strategic framework was developed that identifies the overall process, and key factors that need to be considered from the perspective of SSCs and fans.

##### **8.4.1. Barriers to Social Media Application**

The expected resource limitations for SSCs was identified in the literature review. However, the impact of these limitations on effective social media use was not fully clear until findings were analysed. With all clubs identifying one or more forms of resource limitation directly impacting on their ability to use social media, it is necessary to discuss these issues further. Firstly, a lack of marketing expertise due to the reliance on volunteers has had significant impact on the ability for clubs to fully utilise social media. This is made clear through a lack of objective-setting and guidelines in place for social media use. Without specific objectives being set, social media has not been used effectively to generate value for the club. Additionally, the lack of expertise from volunteers has been identified by several clubs as an issue for not utilising feedback and marketing data made available through social media (Nguyen et al., 2015; Rathore et al., 2016b). Secondly, clubs identified the lack of financial support available to them stating that this limited their ability to use social media effectively. Several clubs identified that their use of social media may enable them to generate a marketing budget, recognising the commercial potential of the platforms. This is supported by Kumar et al. (2016), who argue that social media can

be leveraged as a marketing communications channel for a return on investment. This return on investment of time can lead to financial gains by the organisation, which in turn can be reinvested to social media use.

#### **8.4.2. Social Media Best Practice**

In relation to best practice within social media marketing, several factors need to be considered. Organisations need to identify the purpose for which they are using social media. Kilgour et al. (2015) describe best practice as matching a message with an audience in relation to marketing communications. In order to establish an effective message, the objective for which social media is to be used must be identified. In addition to this, Horbel et al. (2016) states that the aspects of value most important must be based on the relevant context. Therefore, SSCs need to understand the value their fans consider most important in order to facilitate better value co-creation and achieve strategic benefit. Ultimately, best practice in relation to social media strategy is through the identification of values from a fan's perspective, and setting objectives that the club can achieve through using social media as a marketing communications channel. Dolan et al. (2016) identify that currently there is limited academic guidance for best marketing practice on social media; furthermore it is a greater challenge when developing context-specific strategies at a practical level. Research into sports events management has identified that a strategic approach to social media use is required for building brand equity (Thompson et al., 2018). SSCs have indicated that differences exist between audiences on various social media channels; therefore, a strategic approach is required to reach these audiences with an effective message.

There is a clear gap identified through this research at a practical level between best practice and current application of social media in SSCs. Currently clubs are lacking in objective-setting, due to their lack of marketing expertise and time for planning. As identified by Horbel et al. (2016), in order to effectively co-create value through social media, greater levels of understanding are required. This research has identified many important factors necessary for the development of a social media strategy in the context of SSCs aimed at co-creating value with their fans.

Following on from definition of purpose and objectives as the basis for best practice regarding social media application, several authors have identified that customer engagement is a key area for social media marketing managers. Cawsey and Rowley

(2016) identify that best practice for social media marketing is through facilitation of customer engagement, a point supported by Kilgour et al. (2015) who note that an interactive communications process is more effective than non-interactive. Whiting and Deshpande (2016) expand on this by proposing that interaction and communication with those who engage with the organisation on social media is best practice. This would suggest the focused use of resources on those consumers willing to engage with the organisation, and may be beneficial in SSCs with limited resources. The authors also suggest that a professional image of the organisation is required, utilising high quality social media content and images where possible. This is something that is both noted by SSC social media managers and put into practice, highlighting that not all social media marketing in these clubs is ineffective, and that some approaches considered as best practice are applied. Both Broekemier et al. (2015) and Cawsey and Rowley (2016) argue that best practice for social media utilisation is aimed at improving brand awareness among new consumers. Through effective application, improved awareness and brand image can be accomplished. Awareness is another area discussed by SSC marketing managers, suggesting that they are experiencing some benefits of this. However, with a strategic approach to social media application in clubs, this value could be improved.

While Dolan et al. (2016) state that there is limited guidance for marketing practice on social media platforms, leading to difficulties in establishing best practice, this research argues that theoretical marketing approaches such as value co-creation can be adapted for practical application. In other words, the idea of establishing engagement between an organisation and its consumers, or in this context a club and its fans will be the most effective way in which limited resources can be utilised. Positive engagement such as this will lead to organisational benefits, which have been identified by other researchers in generic contexts (Broekemier et al., 2015; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). Horbel et al. (2016) and Popp and Woratschek (2016) argue the need for context-specific research in order to develop effective strategic approaches. This research fills that gap, as a strategic framework for social media marketing has been developed and will be discussed in following sections. There is an evident gap between current social media use and best practice in clubs due to the lack of academic research in the area and lack of resources. Lack of objectives and guidelines have led to a non-strategic and reactive approach being undertaken in clubs. This will limit the



value they can achieve. These values have been identified by authors researching best practice in other fields. While the clubs have acknowledged this potential value, no club suggested that they had reached their potential through social media as a marketing communications channel.

#### **8.4.3. Potential Value**

An issue for SSCs in not following, or having the resources to follow best practices identified by other research is that they may not experience the full value available through social media. This research has led to the development of a strategic framework for social media marketing best practice in the context of SSCs. There are two key forms of value that can be realised through adopting a co-creative approach to social media application: marketing communications value, involving brand management, and financial value through revenue generation and facilitation.

Brand awareness is a key form of value realised through social media marketing. Both Broekemier et al. (2015) and Cawsey and Rowley (2016) identify that effective marketing communications will improve levels of awareness. This is a key organisational benefit as it is identified by Funk and James (2006) as the first stage of developing allegiance to a sports organisation. Cawsey and Rowley (2016) further this by stating that a consequence of increased brand awareness can be an improved brand image, ultimately leading to the generation of brand loyalty. This also ties in with customer engagement, a key objective identified by many of the clubs in this research. As discussed, several authors also identified that engagement with consumers is a key benefit of social media and a way to experience higher levels of value (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2016; Whiting and Deshpande, 2016).

Development and utilisation of brand communities is an effective method of social media utilisation, and a potential value, as it leads to strong ties between consumers, leading to brand benefits for the club (Popp and Woratschek, 2016). This also facilitates both the likelihood of value co-creation, as increased numbers of consumers will be interacting on social media, and brand awareness, as interactions online will have positive effects on awareness levels among non-followers of the organisation.

The achievement of marketing communications value of social media, relating to awareness, interest, and brand development, will consequently lead to increased

financial returns from social media channels, as identified by Blasco-Arcas et al., (2016). Kumar et al. (2016) and Kumar et al. (2017) propose that effective social media usage as a marketing communications channel has a positive impact on sales, and that integrating social media use with traditional marketing communications can increase the marketing effectiveness. In other words, there are synergistic benefits from traditional marketing communications approaches such as planning, strategy development and implementation, paired with an approach based on consumer engagement.

As identified in the findings, financial improvement is not only limited to increased levels of attendance, but also through the development of alternative revenue streams and marketing of these, such as offering club merchandise and advertising this through the appropriate channels. This is further support for the need for a strategic framework, as more effective marketing of alternative revenue streams will lead to commercial development of the club, a key business objective in SSCs.

#### **8.4.4. Value Co-creation through Engagement on Social Media**

RO3 identified the importance of value co-creation on social media within SSCs as an efficient approach to its application within clubs. Based on the analysis of findings, a strategic framework illustrates how value co-creation occurs on social media between the SSC and its fans in figure 8.3. This section will explore how this co-creation occurs, and the key theoretical and managerial implications of this process. Wulf et al. (2017) identified that value for both club and fans is created through the effective use of social media, identifying the impact value co-creation will have on an organisation and its consumers.

The strategic framework identifies that the SSC has its own area of control (internal processes), with barriers to social media use that need to be overcome. By creating content and providing this to an audience, the followers of that club on social media then have their own decision making processes regarding whether to engage with the content. It also highlights that existing followers may still lead to value for the club, even if they do not engage with content. This shows that use of social media that does not lead to engagement may still lead to mutual value for both parties. The external processes on the model identify marketing communications value for the club. That is, setting objectives within the club related to the development of awareness and

attraction among an audience, will develop into behavioural actions such as attendance (monetary value). By achieving repeat value, attachment and allegiance will be developed; however, the identification of factors relating directly to development of attachment and allegiance were beyond the scope of this research. This study was instead focused on the initial stages of developing awareness and attraction through value co-creation on social media within the context of SSCs.

#### **8.4.5. Implications of the Strategic Framework**

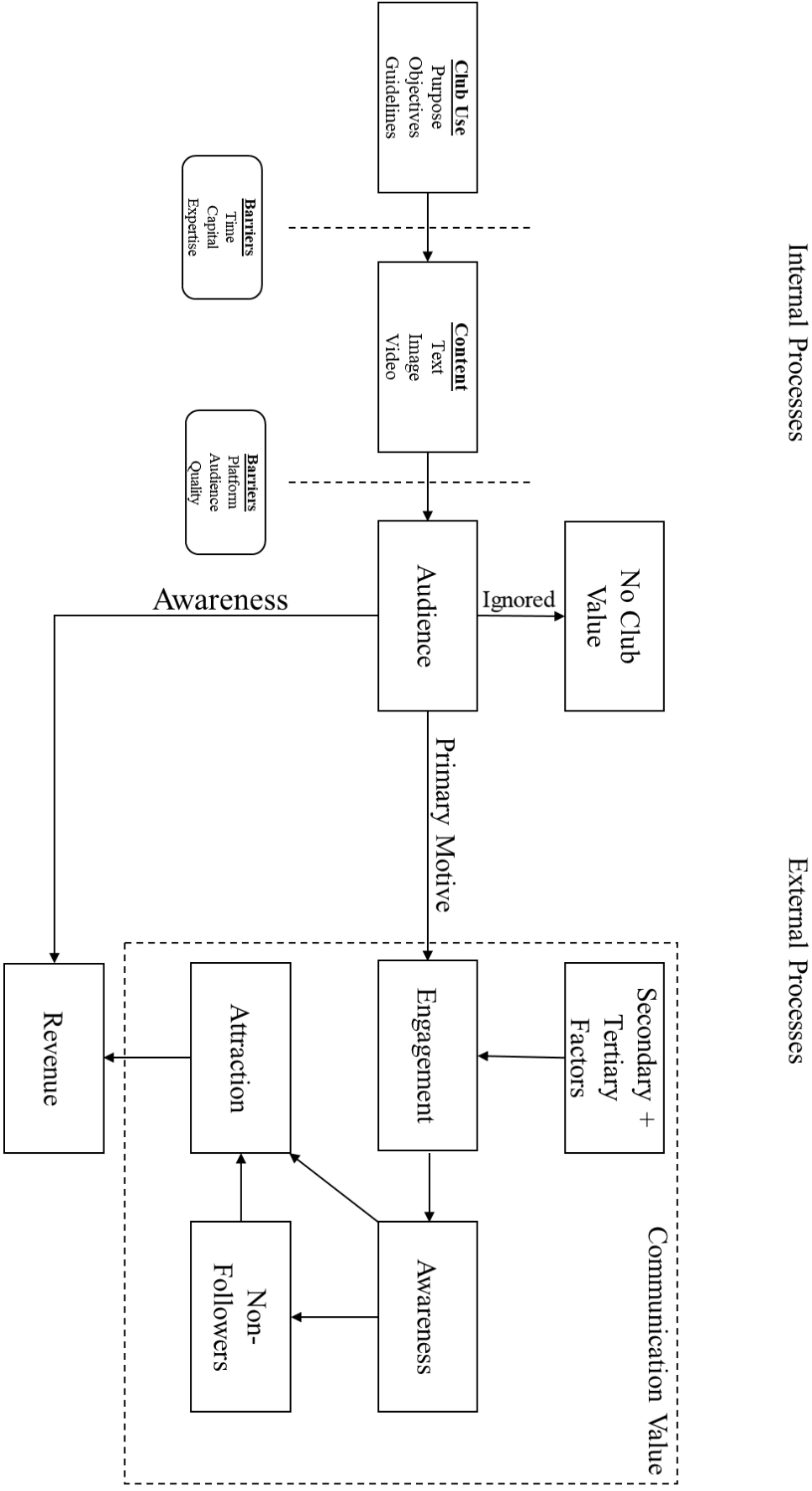
There are several key theoretical and practical implications highlighted by the strategic framework (figure 8.3).

The framework highlights that engagement is central to value co-creation occurring on social media. Engagement is the point where mutual value emerges for both fan and club, and is the point of interaction between both parties. Fans experience additional value prior to engagement, identified as functional, hedonic, social, symbolic, or experiential. This value is necessary in the overall process of engagement, whereby if it is not experienced engagement with content will not occur. It is illustrated in the framework that engagement with content also leads to club value emerging, through the content reaching a larger audience. This will increase awareness among social networks of the SSC. Therefore, this research presents engagement as the locus of value co-creation, as it is where mutual value from social media content emerges for both SSC and fan. This also facilitates future research in the area of value co-creation, such as developing measures of which values and motives for engagement have the greatest impact on engagement numbers. Additionally, future research could look to develop measures of the impact that engagement has from a club's perspective, such as measuring the increase in audience size and the impact this has on improving brand awareness.

In relation to the practical implications of this framework, it is primarily to be utilised as a management tool for planning and strategy development within SSCs. It can be used to identify barriers that must be acknowledged and overcome within clubs, such as limited human or financial resources. It also illustrated the requirement for a focus on what motivates fan engagement with social media content, as this is where clubs receive value from their social media use. Content created within clubs can be developed with this purpose in mind, and focuses on providing altruistic, self-interest,

or cooperative motives to engage. Additionally it highlights the necessity in providing fans with content that gives them value, or no engagement will occur leading to wasted resources within the SSCs. Furthermore, it can be utilised to allow SSCs to control the message being shared on social media, and to have a greater impact on the story potential fans are seeing regarding the club. If clubs are creating content that motivates engagement, they can additionally look to implement a positive brand image, more effectively communicating the club's value proposition. This will lead to more effective application of the resources that are available within SSCs.

**Figure 8.3 – Framework Highlighting Value co-creation on Social Media in SSCs**



#### **8.4.5.1. Process of Value Co-creation on Social Media**

The process of value co-creation on social media involved interaction between the club and supporters. Singaraju et al. (2016) argue that value co-creation occurs from actor to actor interactions on social media. Therefore, value co-creation requires the customer and firm to interact, and utilises the platform of social media. This is in line with earlier findings, which indicated that the social media platform would have an impact on the value co-creation process. Fisher (2015) identified that consumers are involved in multiple stages of the social media value chain. These stages are consumption, production and marketing. In relation to consumption, fans consume social media content for value. As highlighted through this research, there are multiple forms of value that are necessary to be present before engagement can occur. The production stage discussed by Fisher (2015) is that of engagement; it is the co-creative stage of interaction between the club and fans identified by the decision-making process for engagement identified in RO1. Therefore, it can be said that both the consumption and production stages are necessary to achieve effective use of social media. A key finding of this research is the identification of important factors and characteristics of both processes and how they interlink. Fisher (2015) also argues that consumers are involved in the marketing of the organisation. This recognises that engagement with content will have consequential value for organisations, as it raises awareness through social networks. This provides further justification for clubs utilising an approach to social media that centres on value co-creation.

This research identifies the core aspects for how value-co-creation impacts both organisations and consumers on social media. This involves the utilisation of social media to provide value to fans, and in return achieve organisational goals. The identified framework is a useful tool for strategy development and implementation, as all factors involved in the process of effective social media strategy can be considered. Ketonen-Oksi et al. (2016) identified that value is co-created within networks on social media and will have an impact on the business models of organisations; thus, social media is a core aspect to consider from a business perspective. This research indicates that due to the significant marketing value organisations can achieve through effective social media application, involving fans in the process should be a key objective as it will inform key decisions relating to content. Furthermore, Kilgour et al. (2015) argues

that successful marketing communications strategy on social media involves matching a marketing message with an audience. Involving consumers (or fans) in this process is more effective, as the utilisation of social media characteristics can benefit the organisation in identification and satisfaction of consumer needs. In other words, using feedback made available through interaction and engagement on social media, organisations can further develop their marketing communication strategy to further improve their marketing efforts at a practical level. This is supported by Kao et al (2016) who notes that a key value in engagement with consumers is to co-create value with them. The strategic framework identified in this research highlights how engagement occurs, and the antecedents and outcomes of this engagement. Therefore, this research contributes to the understanding of engagement processes involved in social media value co-creation, within the context of sport.

When looking at value co-creation, there is a need to understand the motivations of the actors involved in the process before effective strategic development can be undertaken. Strategy can be developed to co-create value between an organisation and consumers, as long as certain factors are considered (Oh and Syn, 2015). This research identifies the factors that need to be acknowledged within the context of sport, building on the findings of Oh and Syn (2015). The key findings include a recognition of barriers related to strategy development and implementation: limited resources, platform, and quality perception. Additionally this research has identified the motives behind experienced value from social media, for both fans and clubs, and the motives and process of decision making regarding content engagement. Horbel et al. (2016) supports the identification of value and motives within a particular context as a prerequisite for strategic value co-creation to occur. Ultimately with all factors identified and shown in figure 8.3, a strategic framework has been developed that will have both theoretical and managerial implications for clubs. This research also notes that strategic value co-creation is possible at a practical level through utilisation of frameworks and other managerial tools.

As identified by several authors (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Horbel et al., 2016), context plays a key role in the co-creation of value, as value experienced is context-specific. Popp and Woratschek (2016) identify that sport is a suitable context for the utilisation of brand communities. Brand communities involve consumers interacting via social media with one another, with their discussion and

interactions focused on a particular brand or group of brands (Hammedi et al., 2015). Popp and Woratschek (2016) argue that this is an effective way of utilising social media. This research confirms, and builds on this by identifying features of brand communities, such as highly exhibited behaviour loyalty which can be utilised further by a club to co-create value. In other words, through targeting highly loyal fans with content that provides value, these fans will be more likely to engage (as highlighted through RO1), leading to further consequential value for clubs. Zhu and Chen (2015) likewise propose that social media is a relevant platform for collaboration and development of relationships. This furthers the argument that brand communities be utilised on social media for marketing purposes.

Additionally, Urich (2014) discussed the importance of the ‘fan sphere’ and ‘club sphere’ on social media, where content is shared. Clubs can increase control of social media content within the fan sphere, where fan-to-fan interaction occurs to have a positive impact on club value. This research indicates that approaching social media strategically with the intent of co-creating value will result in the increased influence a SSC can have within the fan sphere. Ultimately, this will result in more value for the club through its social media application.

#### **8.4.5.2. Outcomes of Value Co-creation on Social Media**

RO3 identifies that central to value co-creation is the need for engagement, as it facilitates value for the organisation as an outcome of social media use. Blasco-Arcas et al., (2016) note that social media is an engagement platform and as such it can be used to generate both transactional and non-transactional outcomes. Non-transactional outcomes included both engagement and brand development. This provides justification for the empirical study, by supporting the potential for value to be achieved by clubs in terms of marketing-related goals and financial goals. Engagement on social media has additional impacts on the improvement of brand image and consequential purchase intentions. Therefore, by using social media to engage with fans, clubs will be able to receive mutual value as highlighted through the strategic framework (figure 8.3).

By using social media, clubs have the potential to impact consumer behaviour, leading to value and the ability to achieve organisations goals. The strategic framework



identifies the use of FGC as the focus of value co-creation. This is because the firm has control over the content it creates, and this research indicates that having control allows the development of strategy. If the club was reliant on user-generated content for its social media marketing, this may not fit requirements for value co-creation, or engagement and therefore cannot be used reliably for a strategic approach to marketing. FGC on social media has a significant impact on consumer behaviour (Kumar et al., 2016). In other words, creation of FGC can be used to provide value to fans, and in return receive value in relation to organisational goals or financial returns. Effective use of social media had an impact on sales, and an impact on consumer behaviour. By providing content that consumers experience value through, the organisation will also receive value.

Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) argue that UGC has a greater impact on brand loyalty than FGC. This research indicated that this is achieved by developing attachment and brand association. UGC leads to user generated value, or value that consumers are autonomously creating, which also has an impact on brand equity and consumer attitude towards a brand (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). This research agrees that UGC creates greater value for consumers; it is recognised that UGC is a form of co-creation and will provide mutual benefit to fan and club. However, it is argued that this cannot be strategically created and therefore cannot be considered a core focus for strategic value co-creation. A point for future research is to consider how clubs can identify what UGC creates value, and ways to facilitate this.

#### **8.4.6. Theoretical Implications**

This research has led to the development of the first strategic framework illustrating value co-creation in semi-professional sport. The identification of values, factors, and processes involved in facilitating engagement, and the outcomes of this are key contributions to developing value co-creation theory. The framework shows that engagement is central to value co-creation on social media.

The development of a strategic framework justifies the approach for effective social media marketing in SSCs through a co-creative approach with fans. The research shows that strategic value co-creation can be achieved in sports as there is a consistent process involved in both social media application by clubs, and the decision-making process by fans to engage with content. In addition to this, the research has identified

the commercial and marketing value of social media for sports organisations. An evaluation of value from both perspectives (fans and SSC) has provided evidence to link value co-creation with mutual value, in that both parties experience value through social media engagement. This means that the most efficient application of social media in SSCs should focus on facilitating value co-creation.

This study has also presented and justified the most effective approach to be utilised by clubs, by building on existing theories of value co-creation, and developing a strategic framework to achieve this through engagement. The framework also proposes that content and provided value can be strategically managed and therefore is the key to facilitating engagement on social media. The identification of the process of value co-creation also answers Uhrich's (2014) call for research into how sports organisations can more strategically manage social media within the 'fan sphere' to create mutual value. Ultimately, the development of a strategic framework illustrates in theory how this can be achieved.

#### **8.4.7. Practical Implications**

There are several practical implications for marketing managers in SSCs derived from the research. Firstly, marketing managers can utilise the strategic framework to identify aspects within their organisations that impact on their ability to effectively utilise social media as a marketing communications channel. In other words, the key factors for effective social media use and barriers to this have been identified. This will also aid planning and development within the organisation to overcome issues that arise. Secondly, managers can use the framework to identify how they can co-create value with their club's fans through provision of certain types of content that lead to engagement. This means that clubs will be able to identify the areas of value most important to their fans, the primary motives for engagement, and provide these on a more consistent basis. This will incite engagement from fans on a more consistent basis, resulting in a more efficient use of organisational resources. Overall the framework aims to identify how managers can facilitate value co-creation with the fans more effectively via social media.

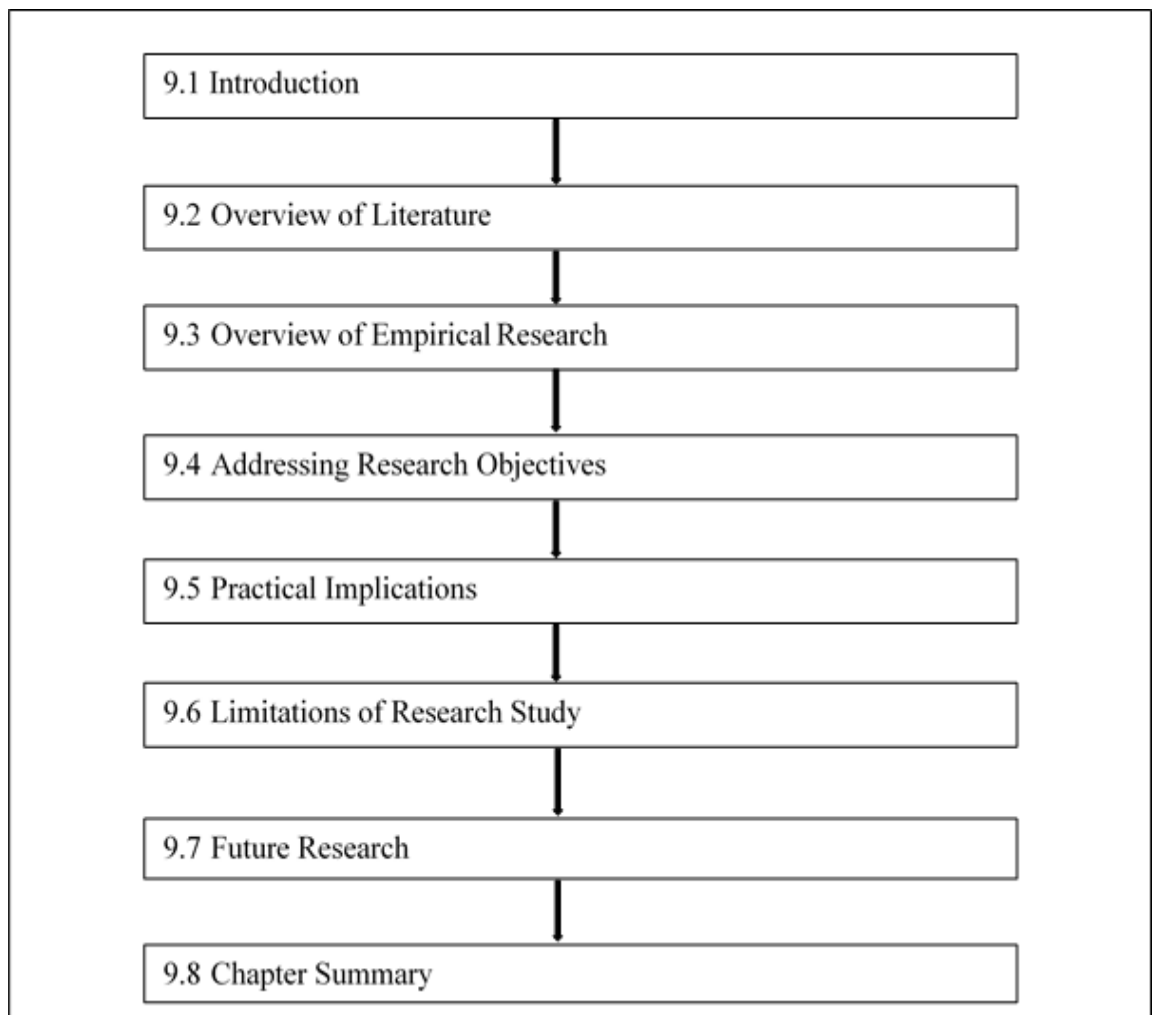
## **8.5. Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the key findings of empirical research with reference to existing literature. There are three key contributions to knowledge, derived from each of the research objectives. Firstly, there is an identification of the key factors involved in a decision-making process from sports consumers to engage with content on social media. Secondly, there was the identification of value in social media from the perspective of SSCs. Thirdly, barriers relating to social media application in SSCs was discussed. This led to the development of a framework for strategic value co-creation using social media within SSCs. These three contributions to knowledge all led to subsequent practical implications for marketing managers in SSCs. Therefore, this research has addressed its overall objective of identifying how social media can be utilised in semi-professional sport to co-create value between a sports club and its fans. The following chapter will conclude the thesis and acknowledge the overall theoretical and practical implications of the empirical research.

## **9.0. CHAPTER NINE: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **9.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents a conclusion to the thesis. An overview of the literature review is provided highlighting key areas of relevance to the study. Following this, an overview of the empirical research methodology is delivered. The chapter identifies each research objective and how the empirical study has addressed these, with reference to key contributions to knowledge that have been delivered. Practical implications of the analysed data are acknowledged, before limitations of the study itself and ideas for future research in the area are given. The chapter ends with a conclusion of the thesis. The structure of this chapter is presented in figure 9.1.



**Figure 9.1 – Conclusion and Recommendations Chapter Structure**

## **9.2. Overview of Literature**

The literature review addressed two key areas relating to the empirical study. Firstly, literature was reviewed regarding the context of sport in order to define the SSC for this research. Enjolras (2002) identified that the structure of sport could be represented as a pyramid (fig 2.2). In order to build a working definition for the SSC, the literature review looked at characteristics of both amateur and elite-level sport in order to illustrate the gap between them at which semi-professional sport existed. Building on Gallagher et al. (2009), Gilmore et al. (2011), and Gallagher et al. (2012), the working definition of a SSC for this research was: *a semi-professional sports club which operates as a profit-for-development organisation, has paid professional athletes or players, relies on volunteer support staff, and aspires to compete at higher levels of sport by developing the club through business practices*. These clubs have characteristics comparable to SMEs and therefore need to operate efficiently to make most effective use of limited resources. Furthermore, SSCs need an efficient approach to social media marketing because it provides clubs with an opportunity to communicate their value proposition to large audiences.

Secondly, marketing literature was reviewed and discussed in the context of sport. The need for SSCs to utilise social media for marketing effectively highlighted a gap in academic literature. While social media is utilised in wider contexts than semi-professional sport, Kilgour et al. (2015) identifies that it is necessary to use it strategically in order to maximise value. Value co-creation as an academic theory suggests that mutual value can be achieved through interaction (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Bechmann and Lomborg, 2013; Healy and McDonagh, 2013). As value co-creation occurs on social media, it would offer an efficient approach if achieved strategically. Therefore, a conceptual model was developed building on theory regarding fan loyalty in sport which suggests that engagement on social media could lead to value co-creation. This formed the basis of the empirical study.

## **9.3. Overview of the Empirical Research Approach**

The philosophical position of the researcher for this study was interpretivist. The empirical research consisted of eight case studies. Each case was conducted with a

football club from the Northern Ireland Football League that fits within the working definition of a SSC. Each case consisted of at least two in-depth semi-structured interviews with fans of the club and one in-depth semi-structured interview with a social media manager at the club. There were two stages of data collection. The first stage consisted of in-depth interviews with club fans in order to collect data relating to RO1 and RO3. In total 20 club fans were interviewed across the eight case studies. The second stage of data collection was comprised of in-depth interviews with club representatives who were responsible for social media channels utilised by the clubs. The purpose of this stage of data collection was to address RO2 and RO3. In total 10 club representatives were interviewed. Data was initially presented as individual cases in chapter five. The data were then analysed by drawing comparisons between cases in chapters six and seven.

#### **9.4. Addressing the Research Objectives**

The overall aim of this research study is to investigate social media application in SSCs to evaluate how value co-creation can be facilitated between the club and its fans. Three research objectives were developed in order to achieve this. Each objective and findings related to it will be outlined below. Contributions to knowledge will also be discussed.

##### **9.4.1. Research Objective One**

*To evaluate the motivations for fan engagement with content from a SSC's social media communication.*

The purpose of RO1 was to understand how fans were motivated to engage with social media content. The research addressed this through interviews with fans of SSCs regarding their social media use and motives for engagement. The research identified multiple values, some of which were consistent across other research that had been identified prior to data collection (hedonic, symbolic, social, and functional). This study identified a new category of social media value in sport: experiential value. This value was determined by how the fan experienced or interpreted the social media content, for example if it was interesting or unique. The research also identified that value was necessary for fans to engage with social media content. If there was no value

present, there would be no engagement. However, it was discovered that value alone did not result in engagement; instead it provided a prerequisite factor that was necessary prior to a decision being made on whether or not to engage with social media content from a SSC. The primary way in which this objective was met through the research was in the identification of three forms of motivation for social media engagement. Firstly, primary motives from fans to engage with social media content from SSCs included self-interest, cooperation, and altruism. These factors were the purpose or intent behind engagement with content, and were the reason why fans decided to engage. Secondly, secondary motives could be presented which encouraged engagement. These are related to experiential values that were identified; in other words, if the content was deemed interesting, or humorous by the individual. Thirdly, tertiary motives mediated the decision making process for fans engaging with social media content. These included typical individual social media behaviour and the social media platform being used.

#### **9.4.1.1. Contribution to Knowledge**

These findings provided a contribution to knowledge in several ways. This study has expanded the understanding of value co-creation in sport, and the influence fan behaviour has on this. Key factors and processes emerged from the data, which are necessary in providing a basis for understanding how value co-creation can be facilitated in social media in sport. An evaluation of factors necessary for engagement from fans of SSCs led to the conclusion that engagement is central to value co-creation occurring on social media. This is because engagement is how both parties (club and fans) interact; a prerequisite for value co-creation to occur. A model was developed from the analysed data presenting a decision-making process regarding engagement with social media content from SSC fans. This identifies key areas that need to be considered when evaluating social media engagement in sport. From existing literature, it was expected that value on social media would lead to engagement. However, this research has identified that while value must be present, it can only encourage engagement as a secondary motive.

Primary motives to engage were related to the purpose individuals had for engaging with content. Additionally, this research develops knowledge regarding fan behaviour

on social media in semi-professional sport. The expectancy prior to research was that fans from higher behavioural loyalty categories (Fans and Committed Supporters) would be more likely to engage with club social media content than those of lower behavioural loyalty categories (Casual Followers and Social Devotees). This finding may be unique to semi-professional sport and should be explored further in future research (see section 9.7). This research has also identified a new category of value to be considered in future social media research. Experiential value as a category is not discussed in existing literature. This research confirmed the existence of four other categories of social media values for fans of SSCs (hedonic, symbolic, social, functional), adding to knowledge regarding social media in semi-professional sport.

#### **9.4.2. Research Objective Two**

*To evaluate the perceived value of social media use and application as a marketing communications channel from the SSC's perspective.*

RO2 focused on evaluating value through social media application from the perspective of SSCs. In order to meet this objective, data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews with social media managers in clubs. Initially, these interviews focused on identifying the objectives and purpose behind social media use within SSCs. By identifying this, the desired values from clubs in using social media emerged. In many clubs no formal objectives were set regarding what to achieve through social media. In these instances, the opinion of the social media manager was taken into consideration on what they desired to achieve through its use. Key values for clubs that were deduced from the findings were both financial value and communicative value. Financial values that the clubs wished to achieve were by generation of attendance and the development of revenue streams. The primary communicative value that clubs both sought and achieved through social media use was in communicating information to fans, resulting in raised awareness. They indicated that this resulted in financial value through increased attendances. Additionally, clubs often identified that they used social media with the purpose of engaging with fans. This indicated a two-way communication as opposed to the general raising of awareness. Clubs discussed that to achieve engagement, image and video content were more effective.



#### **9.4.2.1. Contribution to Knowledge**

Prior research has not developed an understanding of value in social media application from the perspective of a SSC. This research has also provided insight into the characteristics of SSCs as organisations. It has identified that SSCs primarily value financial and communicative returns from social media application. Even though value was recognised from social media from all clubs, many did not develop a plan or strategy in order to achieve it. There were limited defined objectives within clubs to achieve goals which limited the value potential from social media application. Not all clubs cited financial value as the purpose of utilising social media. This is a potential oversight from clubs at a practical level due to the evidence from several clubs that social media has had a significant impact on attendance. In relation to limitations, a key finding regarding all clubs was the issue of time management. This validates the need in SSCs for an efficient approach to marketing that will result in a mutual value experience between fans and clubs.

Engagement with fans was also seen as a primary value of social media. However, the majority of clubs did not discuss the consequent impact of engagement on raising awareness or generating revenue. This furthers the argument that strategic development is required in semi-professional sport. By developing strategies for engagement, clubs would be able to achieve multiple objectives simultaneously and experience multiple forms of synergistic value. It can be said that SSCs are prioritising fan value when discussing engagement on social media over a return on investment by developing revenues. While they do recognise the value of social media, barriers which limit their ability to access this exist. The existence of these issues provides validation that SSCs operate under unique circumstances. Expected similarities with SME marketing were also proven through this research. RO3 evaluates these barriers and the findings indicate that an approach focusing on mutual value through social media would overcome many of the issues. Furthermore, the need for an updated definition for SSCs was also justified, as clubs discussed their intentions for commercial and professional development.

### **9.4.3. Research Objective Three**

*To compare fans' and SSCs' perspectives regarding social media use to identify causes and barriers to co-creating value on social media between fans and clubs.*

The purpose of RO3 was in evaluating the barriers to effective social media application in SSCs. By achieving this objective it was possible to develop a strategic framework that facilitates improved social media marketing in clubs as the identified barriers can be overcome. As this research focused on value co-creation, or the creation of mutual value through social media application between a SSC and its fans, this objective was met by analysing the data collected at both stages of the primary research. The key barriers identified within clubs centred on SSCs' limited objectives and planning which limits the potential value clubs can receive. There are also limited guidelines within clubs, and from the league body that can lead to issues such as inconsistency in communication style, and a damage to brand image. Resource limitations that were expected (from comparisons with SMEs) were also confirmed through data collection. All clubs identified lack of a social media budget as an issue, in addition to limited time. These resources controlled the ability of SSCs to create image and video content, which was noted as being more effective at facilitating fan engagement. Additionally, a lack of coordination between volunteers was apparent in several instances. A key characteristic of the SSCs interviewed in this study was that there were multiple members of a social media team. Therefore, issues in coordination between these caused problems for clubs in relation to professionalism, strategy development and brand consistency.

#### **9.4.3.1. Contribution to Knowledge**

The findings regarding RO3 contributed to knowledge the barriers to effective social media application in SSCs. This resulted in the development of a strategic framework based on the achievement of value co-creation. This is the first strategic framework that illustrates how value co-creation occurs in semi-professional sport, which includes the factors, values and processes involved. The framework also identifies how engagement on social media can be facilitated through developing an understanding of how and why fans engage with SSCs' social media content. Engagement is shown to be at the centre of value co-creation on social media, as it is

where interaction between club and fans occur. Therefore, the facilitation of engagement leads to value co-creation, and effective social media application by clubs.

Primarily, this research has identified that lack of strategy in clubs has limited the effectiveness of social media use as a marketing communications channel. This may be attributed to the lack of existing research in the topic area. While multiple clubs identified the purpose of social media was to engage with fans, there was no underlying strategy in achieving this. The lack of focus on strategically engaging with fans limits the potential value for SSCs, resulting in ineffective social media application. The development of the strategic framework identifies key areas within this process that need to be considered in order for value to be effectively co-created on social media. The framework also highlights the importance of engagement as a process in facilitating this value co-creation, primarily limiting value return on investment for SSCs. A key conclusion that can be drawn from the empirical research is that currently there is a focus on social media use within clubs to provide value to fans without aiming to receive a return on the investment of time and human resources that are employed to these channels. By developing strategies in clubs, a greater balance between fan value and club value can be achieved, resulting in more efficient social media use. This research also identifies how value co-creation occurs on social media in semi-professional sport between the SSC and its fans, and identifies that mutual value can be achieved strategically. SSCs can increase revenue through more effective social media use. That is, through increasing levels of awareness and attraction among fans, behavioural loyalty will increase, resulting in greater levels of attendance and increased merchandise sales. Ultimately, understanding how social media is used in clubs and the barriers to its effective application will allow clubs to develop the necessary strategies through objective-setting and developing tactics to achieve these to increase value from social media. It will also provide greater value to fans, where the acknowledgement of desired value from fans can be satisfied and results in mutual value being experienced. This study has advanced existing value co-creation theory in both sport and on social media.

## **9.5. Practical Implications**

This research resulted in the development of a strategic framework for effective social media application in SSCs utilising value co-creation. These findings allow social media managers to develop strategies that aim to provide these values to fans. From the research it has also been identified that within clubs, a strategy for social media application must be developed, as there is a lack of this in semi-professional sport. This research has also identified the need to set clear objectives within clubs as part of strategy development. The strategic framework can then be utilised where necessary to identify key factors in achieving these objectives. A lack of social media policy and limited guidelines on social media application must be overcome, as this leads to issues when multiple volunteers operate a marketing communications channel within the clubs, including inconsistency in communication style. By improving these areas within SSCs, social media use will become more efficient. If fan engagement on social media is a primary objective of clubs, the framework identifies key areas that need to be addressed in order to achieve this effectively. Findings also highlight the importance of fan engagement being threefold: increases audience, improves revenue generation and develops fan loyalty. This research has answered the call from Uhrich (2014) for sports clubs to have greater impact in fan sphere on social media to improve their own value. Overall this research has identified how strategic value co-creation may occur on social media in semi-professional sport, and provides a framework for managers to achieve this at a practical level.

The primary application of the strategic framework (figure 8.3) is to aid in planning within clubs, and for strategy development. Through application of the model, SSCs will be able to consider the key factors impacting on how they can utilise social media to co-create value. The model will aid practitioners in considering key resource limitations that impact upon their social media usage. For example, some types of content may require more time to create than others. The creation of such content could be planned in advance to reduce the limitations on time, improving the efficiency of resource application within SSCs. Additionally, where content such as video content is being created, volunteers with the necessary skills or competencies may be required for its development. Utilising the framework will aid clubs in planning their

development of such content around the availability of required volunteers or required equipment that may be needed in other areas.

The framework will also aid in the strategic use of social media within SSCS. As factors involved in engagement have been identified through this research, strategy regarding their implementation in social media content development can be carried out. Firstly, the social media managers within clubs will be able to develop content that provides fans with one or more of the values identified from this research. As illustrated, this value is the first step in the facilitation of engagement. Secondly, social media managers will be able to develop content that aims to facilitated engagement by implementing a focus on the primary motives for engagement. By creating content that leads to engagement through altruism, self-interest, or cooperative motives, SSCs will increase engagement levels. The will subsequently lead to the content reaching a wider audience. Thirdly, SSCs will be able to strategically create content that improves their brand image, increases brand awareness, or better communicates their value proposition. This is important as it enables exploitation of the increased audience generated from fan engagement with their social media content. Ultimately, this leads to a more effective use of social media in SSCs as a marketing communications channel.

## **9.6. Limitations of Research Study**

There were several limitations of this study. Firstly, while the context of the study is in semi-professional sport, the empirical research was limited to football clubs. The study does not claim generalisability; however, this may mean that findings are not consistent with SSCs in other sports. Secondly, a further limitation to this study was that the locus was within Northern Ireland. This creates two limitations: only a small number of sports organisations exist that fit within the working definition of a SSC, and the findings of the study may differ based on geography. In other words, while the factors influencing decision making from fans to engage with social media content have been identified, behaviour of individuals may differ depending on their country of origin. In addition, clubs may also operate within slightly different conditions or under different legislation that limits their use of social media. Thirdly, the nature of sports fans limited the application of focus groups as a methodological choice for this study. This was due to the passion involved in sport fandom that led to arguments as

opposed to discussion on certain topics. Finally, the study is qualitative in nature and due to the multiple-case study approach undertaken, the findings are not representative of all SSC fans or all SSCs. In-depth interviews were an appropriate method of research within the case studies to gain insights into perspectives from the individual respondents; however, the use of in-depth interviews limited the study, as no quantitative data was collected. Therefore, to identify more applicable factors (such as secondary factors in fan decision making, or SSC barriers), a future study would need to employ an approach with representative sampling.

### **9.7. Future Research**

Future research will build on the findings of this study. The development of research regarding the fan-decision making process for social media engagement may have an impact on a wider context of sport, being either amateur or professional. Therefore, to develop this, a study testing the key factors identified across multiple levels of sport may be undertaken. Additionally, to address the limitations of this research, a larger sample size that is representative could be utilised to ensure that all influencing factors are discovered. Future quantitative studies could measure the importance of different values that are identified regarding motivating engagement. In other words, are fans more likely to engage because of altruistic motivations or self-interest? There is also potential for studies to focus more on the relationship between behavioural loyalty as a fan, and engagement with social media. For example, are there particular values that are more impactful on engagement from a Committed Supporter than a Casual Follower?

Future research may also address the limitations of this study. A similar study could be conducted on SSCs across multiple countries, with comparisons drawn between them to identify operating conditions and the impact this has on social media value from a club's perspective. It could also aim to identify differences in fan behaviour in social media engagement based on geographic location. Future studies may also compare findings across different sports. While this study focused on football, rugby fans or American football fans may engage differently on social media. Again, these clubs may also operate under different conditions based on competitive structure or legal constraints. Future research could investigate the contribution of SSCs in the

context of economic and social development. Furthermore, any research that has substantial practical implications for SSCs in their business development should be valued due to the economic impact these clubs may have.

Future research could look at both aspects of the role of SSCs within communities in Northern Ireland. While sport has the opportunity to bring communities together, and improve cross-community relations (Schulenkorf, 2012), it may also be divisive under certain circumstances, such as through the expression of culture. A future study could investigate several cases where improvement of community relations, and areas where issues have arisen, in order to evaluate key factors in how sport can affect communities. Another area for future studies to investigate is the economic impact that SSCs can have, and an identification in how social media application can be utilised to facilitate this. For example, measuring the impact of local businesses (such as travel agents, hotels etc.) and their cooperation with SSCs in promoting services to travelling supporters from other European countries.

## **9.8. Conclusion of Thesis**

This chapter discussed how the empirical study addressed the overall research objectives, and highlighted the theoretical and practical contributions of the study.

The thesis was presented over nine chapters. A literature review was conducted with the purpose of clarifying the research context and the research problem. Literature regarding semi-professional sports was identified as limited. An analysis of existing marketing literature and value co-creation literature was presented. The literature review indicated that an approach to social media marketing within SSCs could be effective if an approach using value co-creation was undertaken. The research aimed to evaluate how this would be possible through achieving three research objectives. RO1 looked at social media value from the fans' perspective. RO2 looked at social media value from the clubs' perspective. The purpose of RO3 was to evaluate social media application in SSCs and evaluate the barriers to effective and proactive use. The empirical study consisted of eight case studies, which were conducted with fans of SSCs and social media managers within these clubs. The analysed data led to discoveries regarding the decision-making process of fans regarding whether or not to engage with social media content. From the SSCs' perspectives, key values for social

media use were through communication and raising awareness, and in the generation of revenue. A strategic framework highlighting the process of value co-creation on social media was developed. This identified the key areas for consideration at a practical level for SSCs when aiming to co-create value on social media.

SSCs can be utilised to develop external social and economic factors that have an influence on the club itself. As SSCs involved in this research exemplify, clubs are often reliant on public funding for support (DCAL, 2004). Through the improvement of marketing within SSCs, clubs will be able to generate increased revenues autonomously and reduce the reliance on public spending. Additionally, SSCs often lie at the heart of the local community from which they have developed. Their catchment areas tend to be small and can be attributed to how clubs have developed from amateur, participation-driven sport (Boothby and Tungatt, 1978). Sport has often been utilised by governments as a method for social development. This may occur through the implementation of community-based programmes that focus on providing value to the community surrounding a SSC. SSCs have further opportunity to promote these community-driven initiatives that aim to aid the communities through their social media use. Clubs involved within this research have already started utilising social media for this purpose – such as C4's RTB initiative, focused on providing families with an opportunity to bring children to matches that provide additional forms of entertainment. An additional way in which SSCs can promote socioeconomic development is through tourism. While limited amount of travelling fans attend UEFA Champions League, and UEFA Europa Cup matches, through greater cooperation between SSCs and public bodies, a wider audience could be targeted by promoting local facilities, events, and attractions. This would provide sustainable development for the communities and local businesses surrounding the clubs.

Overall, this study contributes knowledge in relation to the strategic use of social media within SSCs, with a focus on facilitating value co-creation between a SSC and its fans. Social media is an important marketing communications channel within semi-professional sport, and this study highlights the issues regarding lack of strategy and resources that need to be overcome within clubs for it to be utilised effectively. This study has resulted in the development of a strategic framework illustrating the key factors involved in the process of value co-creation between a SSC and its fans on social media. The study has provided knowledge regarding factors involved in



motivating engagement on social media, where engagement is recognised as being vital to value co-creation between the SSC and its fans.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix One: Case One – C1

The case study of C1 had two in-depth interviews with fans of the club. One in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with the social media manager at C1. C1 was case one of eight, and referred to as C1.

#### 1.0. Stage One: Fan Interviews

This section presents the findings from fan interviews conducted to meet RO1 and RO3. In total, two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in the case of C1

#### 1.1. Fan Classification

C1F1 can be classed as a casual follower of C1 due to his relocation out of the country. An interesting point raised by C1 was that they notice they have a lot of fans who live abroad. While C1F1 does not live in the country, he still manages to attend one or two matches per year, showing that there is still an existing affiliation to the club. When discussing attendance in the past, C1F1 states that he would have attended half of their home matches per season (~8 matches). This shows that he would have previously been in a fan segment showing higher levels of loyalty, identifying that supporters of a club are able to move between segments based on external forces influencing their ability to attend. C1F2 identifies himself as a Casual Follower of C1 who previously attended matches more often when he was younger.

Topic	Evidence
Fan Classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “So I’ve moved away, and I live in England as you know, so I only get to one or two games a year, and that’s all I’ve been able to manage for the last kinda, three, four years now.” (C1F1)</li><li>• “Yeah, about half the home games a season.” (C1F1)</li><li>• “Yeah, the grassroots element of working my way into their system, meant that I was then interested in - how the senior team developed and played and like kinda kept that keen interest up.” (C1F1)</li><li>• “It was after our Primary School football match they took us to see a Comrades game. It was at the Comrades ground.” (C1F2)</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Probably about 10 games or so a season (inaudible) lads – never a priority if there was nothing else to do we would go to see them.” (C1F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“When I was mid-teens I did a wee bit then when I got older I stopped going as much and then for a few years during uni I would go ‘cause one of my old classmates played for them but the past year or so I haven’t been very much.” (C1F2)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A1 – 1.1 – Quotations related to Fan Classification.**

Table A1 – 1.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.1. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were classified into a particular fan category.

## **1.2. Social Media Behaviour**

In relation to personal social media use and behaviour, C1F1 states that he would use Twitter as a primary platform, with Facebook being less predominant. In terms of how social media is used by C1F1, he identified that private messaging as a feature is key for him in regards to organising match attendances, as opposed to sharing and engaging with content. Throughout other examples given by C1F1 he can be seen as a typically passive user of social media. Primarily C1F2 uses Facebook, and states that this is the only channel he follows C1 on. He discusses using Instagram to follow Premier League Football, and identifies this as an important social media channel.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Social Media Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Yeah, mainly through the social media platforms that they use, so I’d tend to focus on the likes of Twitter, that what I tend to be most active on....I would use Facebook to a slightly lower extent.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Oh yeah, that would maybe be the main way, mainly through private message on social media as opposed to sharing to lots of people or I might ask on social media if anybody wants to go, to try and get a general feel for who wants to go but, whenever I sort of partake I tend to do it through private messaging.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“FB, Instagram, Snapchat. Used to use Twitter but not anymore.” (C1F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>Following football on Instagram...following the other football teams I like.” (C1F2)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A1 – 1.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Behaviour.**

Table A1 – 1.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.2. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents used social media.

### 1.3. Social Media Value

C1F1 identifies his primary focus for value is information. He also describes content as needing to be interesting to provide value. The key value in information for C1F1 is linked to awareness of new events, and keeping up-to-date, highlighting a characteristic of social media through the speed at which information can be gained. Another form of value that C1F1 discusses is through competitions and ticket giveaways, highlighting a further desire for functional value from social media. When discussing C1 specifically, C1F1 highlights that match information while being located outside the country is primarily where value can be received; however, he states that if he was capable of attending a match then promotions regarding matches and merchandising would be of greater benefit. C1F2 identifies his primary value from social media as information.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I think the content they post on Facebook is more, interesting for me, so I think they don’t post as much there but what they do post tends to be higher quality.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“On a social level if you’re perceived to have knowledge over sharing an event it can look quite good in your favour or appearance.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The likes of Twitter is a great way to find out about current events, things that are happening, it’s really good for the news as well that’s what I find out most of the information for that, as well as for sports information would be my two main interests.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yeah I would say so, they’re definitely certain, I think it’s a great platform for being able to challenge your own ideas.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I would follow the likes of Manchester United on Facebook as well as Twitter, but I think for some of the more professional teams the Facebook kind of promotion and social media surrounding them tends to be of greater value than the Twitter experience in my opinion.” (C1F1)</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“With C1 I tend to use it mainly for the scores because I’m so far away, mainly just as an information source. If I was home more often I would use them probably for the likes of merchandising, promotions. Yeah I mean currently I don’t see a lot of value outside of the scores and the squads’ announcements to give me that more informed social media experience.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I tend to look for either, ticket giveaways if they’re gone, I tend to look for the likes of information about the team, the squad, standings within tables, fixture lists, who they’re likely to play against.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yeah, most of the C1 games, that would’ve been the only way that I would know if the games happening or not.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“There’s usually just updates and commentary, and analysis.” (C1F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yes I still follow their results on ah Facebook mainly. And I check the league table on the football leagues website every so often usually during main points of the year.” (C1F2)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A1 – 1.3 – Quotations related to Social Media Value.**

Table A1 – 1.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.3. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents experienced value through their social media use.

#### **1.4. Motives to Engage**

C1F1 states that he primarily engages with content for personal gain. He states that he engages when there are giveaways regarding tickets or merchandise, and goes on to identify that physical incentives motivate this behaviour on social media. This relates to one of the values in social media that he identified through competitions. This identifies that clubs who have fans motivated to engage by self-interest should provide content such as competitions and giveaways to facilitate engagement. C1F2’s primary motive to engage with content is humour. He states that he will “like” content regularly; however, he elaborates and states that he will share content he considers as important.

Topic	Evidence
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Motives to Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“If it was a giveaway for, I dunno, merchandise, I think - ticketing I would follow, I would share for that.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I mean, there’s always the physical incentives as well like the tickets or the merchandise if that’s what they’re sharing for.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Normally it would be promotions, so if there’s, for example, a giveaway for tickets or a giveaway for merchandise.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“A new signing or player injury.” (C1F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Other than like it? No.” (C1F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If it was about somebody I knew or it was funny” (C1F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“...usually just tagging and stuff – if there’s anything to share that’s important then, yeah.” (C1F2)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A1 – 1.4 – Quotations related to Motives to Engage.**

Table A1 – 1.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.4. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were motivated to engage with social media content.

## **2.0.Stage Two Club Interviews**

This section presents the findings from club representative interviews conducted to meet RO2 and RO3. In total, one in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted in the case of C1

### **2.1.Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources**

C1 are one of two Championship teams that were interviewed as part of the research. The respondent for C1 described his role as having developed to an advisory position, but is involved in social media and its inception at the club. He also identified that C1 were the first football team in the then ‘Irish League’ to adopt social media and use it to post text-based commentary of matches. The club now have two individuals on the social media team. The social media team have individual roles; it is identified that one is in charge of the match updates and the other provides club news during non-match days. In relation to time allocated to social media, C1’s social media advisor states that “a few hours” would be spent. It is difficult to determine whether this is per person or not; however, with the club providing text-based match coverage, it is safe to interpret this as a few hours per person. This highlights the limited time volunteers have. There is no reference made to how long is spent per week planning social media

use, which would suggest that limited strategy is implemented at the club. In relation to the social media channels used by the club, they are currently focusing on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. C1's social media advisor identifies that they also have Flickr for image hosting and sharing; however, it is acknowledged that this is an outdated platform.

Topic	Evidence
Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"I'm probably more in an advisory role at the moment." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"We were actually the first club here to put live feeds on to Twitter and Facebook of texting matches. Obviously we'd taken it from the likes of the BBC etc. that were doing it but we were the first club in Northern Ireland to do it." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"There would be probably 2 guys that do it. One would do more of the actual match updates, the live stuff and basically there's another guy who would put a lot of information on during the week of events that's happening, and fundraising and other bits and pieces." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"It's hard to estimate how long per week they put on, but it would be a few hours anyway is spent on it." (C1R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A1 – 2.1 – Quotations related to Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources.**

Table A1 – 2.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.1. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described their role, the social media channels used at the club, and the available resources.

## **2.2. Social Media Objectives and Purpose**

The primary objective for C1 in adopting social media was to generate interest in the club from local supporters. Through this objective, it is clear that the club recognise the marketing potential of social media channels. C1's social media advisor also states that the primary audience it wished to reach was "younger" – an implication of what they believe the age demographic of social media users to be. Furthermore, the club consider that they have achieved success from this objective, stating that a younger audience has started to attend their matches. Apart from the desire to generate interest in attendance at club matches, no other specific objectives have been set.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Objectives and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Basically it all started to try and get interest in the club. Whenever I first got involved in the club here we didn’t have a lot of support – local support, and we wanted to sort of reach out to a younger generation.” (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“That seemed to spring a lot of interest – especially the younger guys who have now started to actually come to the matches so it has worked in that.” (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“No specific targets – we just, whenever I came to the club...there was nobody here that knew anything about social media, or wanted to know about social media – so it was a case that...we wanted to sort of push it out there, no goals were set and it was just to see if it worked or didn’t work. And it seems to have worked.” (C1R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A1 – 2.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Objectives and Purpose.**

Table A1 – 2.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.2. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described the social media objectives and purpose for its use within the club.

### **2.3. Club Use of Social Media**

C1’s social media advisor proposes that the club do not have a particularly planned or strategic approach to social media use. The club, like other cases, identify that they have a planned approach on match days in regards to what content that will be posted during every game. This covers line-ups, opposing team news, scores and results; the only changes will be the commentary of the match which cannot be predetermined. C1’s social media advisor states that the objective had been achieved; therefore, there may not be a current focus on increasing further the local levels of support or attendance. It is acknowledged by the club that there is a need for them to continually adapt their social media use and channels. This recognition is in particular reference to maintaining use of the most effective communications channel, where the primary audience for the club are found.

C1 have begun to use video content through streaming live matches through Facebook and YouTube. While not discussing the purpose behind this directly, it can be proposed that the primary value achieved through this will be fan value, as they state it has been well received. A key issue that will require monitoring from the club is

whether or not this results in a drop in attendance, particularly when factors such as poor weather may encourage fans to stay at home and watch from there.

Regarding what type of content appears popular among fans, C1's social media advisor proposes that fans primarily engage with goal news and information. Further to this, information regarding player performance and team news for both home and away clubs are key areas of fan interaction. It is clear from the identification of these forms of content that C1 receives the majority of interaction and engagement through its match day content.

Topic	Evidence
Club Use of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"We now have a live video that goes out over Facebook on a - we've tried it out the last couple of games here which is a live feed of the match. There's no commentary on it – it's a live feed of the match going on which seems to be a fairly big hit now." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"We've our own channel on YouTube which basically were putting it through that. So there's no cross over because basically the BBC or Sky or anybody – because we're in the Championship there's no bounds." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"During a match there's a planned approach. Obviously the team is put up – 10, 15 minutes before kick-off. Again we've brought in...you'll probably have seen it – we have the small team lineout and we change that if its 4-4-2 or whatever formation, the players in, the subs in. So that obviously comes into it...we try and update the feed as accurately as we can." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"They will comment for instance if a goal goes in and it's curled in from the penalty box, you will comments – great goal, fantastic, seen this... If a player plays well or seems to play well, there's comments after the game. So there's a lot of interaction on it, after the initial comments that we'll make on it – the official comments." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"He'll maybe have somebody on the bench, there will be comments about this...we also put the opposing team's players on and they'll say, "Oh why isn't this one playing, or what happened to them?" So there are a lot of comments that way so, we can get sort of feedback on it." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"Key areas for improvement...probably as social media changes, we need to change with it. And it's basically keeping everybody informed – we are</i></li> </ul>

	<i>aware that Twitter and Facebook are becoming older, and things have moved on, and we need to move on with it...there's little point in doing live text on Twitter/Facebook and then finding nobody's using and they're watching YouTube, or have moved onto something else." (C1R1)</i>
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**Table A1 – 2.3 – Quotations related to Club Use of Social Media.**

Table A1 – 2.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.3. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described how the club were using social media currently.

#### **2.4. Club Social Media Value**

The primary value for C1 through using social media was an increase in attendance, linking back to their primary objective of generating interest from local support. It is stated by C1's social media advisor that their attendance figures have risen by three to four times the amount in 2009 when social media was adopted by the club. This will result in significant monetary value through increased revenue from the club. A further benefit gained from social media that C1's social media advisor refers to several times is that the audience is growing because of younger followers of the club – again attributing this to social media being used as their marketing communication channel. This has resulted in further benefits to the club. They have been able to develop alternative revenue streams such as the opening of a club shop, due to demand from younger fans that had been gained through social media.

C1's social media advisor identifies that the primary way in which social media was used to achieve such value was through increasing awareness of the club and when they were playing: *"this is all a spin off we're finding from social media, because we inform also the fans as well when matches are on – if there's a change"* (C1R1). Social media is also used to promote awareness of the revenue streams that are available, such as by advertising the club shop. This revenue stream is made available online, and C1's social media advisor discusses that it allows fans who cannot attend matches to generate revenue for the club through purchasing shirts and merchandise.

A recognition of value from social media is through shared information, and the awareness it generates. C1 have links to other local sports clubs, which is referred to by C1's social media advisor when asked about the sharing of information on social media. C1's social media advisor said they want to get the information out as best they

can and use these links with other clubs where possible. There is recognition that social media is being used in this way and having an impact on attendance levels. C1's social media advisor links this impact to potential fans using social media as a medium or channel for this sort of information (match awareness).

Topic	Evidence
Club Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"We wanted to get guys who were actually wanting to support the team and we've got that. We now have a core of guys – and there's been a spin off from that, we've been able to develop a shop because the younger guys had been interested in wanting to buy a shirt from the club." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"Now I'm not sort of saying this has suddenly developed to getting crowds here of thousands – but were getting a good probably 3 times, 4 times more than we were back in 2009." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"We have a website and we have an actual shop – online shop that sells well, because we do have supporters from all over the world – guys who came from C1 originally." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"It's obviously the revenue that comes from the guys coming in. The younger generation that are coming in are inclined to buy things – not only from the shop but we have things like burger stands here, so there's more of those sold... But again this is all a spin off we're finding from social media, because we inform the fans as well when matches are on – if there's a change. As I say, this Friday we have a match, so we will have a bit of a build up to it on social media and we find Friday nights obviously bring more people in." (C1R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"We try to get it out best we can. And we have, obviously links with other local people in the town, who maybe do other events for different things – the rugby and the hockey, and...we're on their pages, so were hoping to draw as much information...we do notice the fact that if we're not playing at 3 o'clock on a Saturday there's an increase. That increase simply comes from people who are looking at their Twitter, Facebook and as I say not technically the C1 site – could be the rugby site, other sites... And again this is the younger guys that are coming in simply because they are using the medium." (C1R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A1 – 2.4 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Value.**

Table A1 – 2.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.4. These quotations provide information on how the club representative interpreted the value which the club was experiencing from its social media use.

## 2.5. Social Media Issues

C1's social media advisor did not identify any other issues with social media other than the lack of resources they had available in the previous example. C1's social media advisor states that the club attempt to make everything they put on social media as accurate as possible, and to "keep an eye" on any comments that are made towards the club. In addition, he identifies that anything overly negative gets taken down quickly.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>"If there's anybody that would be quite negative it will be taken down – it's not a case we don't keep an eye on it. We try obviously social media is social media, it's hard to keep everything – but as far as the club is concerned in statements that are put out by the club, everything is as accurate as it can be and we do keep a close eye on any comments coming our direction." (C1R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A1 – 2.5 – Quotations related to Social Media Issues.**

Table A1 – 2.5 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.5. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described issues they experienced in their use of social media at the club.

## 3.0. Summary of Findings

C1F1 of C1 identifies as a Casual Follower of the club due to no longer living within travelling distance of the stadium. He states that value from their social media will primarily be limited to information because of this. In relation to engagement, he mentions personal gain as a primary motive, identifying that fans who value self-interest will be likely to engage with particular forms of content. C1F2 also identified as a Casual Follower. His primary value from social media was information; however, he proposed that his primary motive to engage with content was humor. C1 have had success in achieving marketing-related objectives through social media. Their social media advisor provide evidence that it has been used directly to increase attendances

and to develop additional revenue streams. They also identify its value as a communications channel.



## Appendix Two: Case Two – C2

The case study of C2 had 2 in-depth interviews with fans of the club. One in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with the social media manager at C2. C2 was case two of eight, and referred to as C2.

### 1.0. Stage One: Fan Interviews

This section presents the findings from fan interviews conducted to meet RO1 and RO3. In total, two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in the case of C2

#### 1.1. Fan Classification

C2F1 identifies that in the past he was attending matches up to ten times per year, putting him in the category of social devotee. Another reason for this categorisation is that while attendance may have dropped slightly, is that his primary reason for attending was the social aspect. C2F2 can be categorised as a Casual Follower of C2 due to the lack of match attendance. He indicates that he will only attend several matches per season, which are those he considers as important.

Topic	Evidence
Fan Classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“I would say I used to attend maybe 5 to 10 times a year...Of recent I’ve been to a couple of games. However, as I’ve got older it’s something I’ve actually grown out of.” (C2F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“I supported C2 since I was young, since I was around 10 years old. The first reason I started following them was because it was really my family had a following of them. And it was something I wanted to get interested in, to become sociable within the community.” (C2F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“So C2 was fun to go to because it was a sociable event and you get to meet new people and also to be passionate about something.” (C2F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“I only attend important matches now...big games, and the Boxing Day game” (C2F2)</i></li></ul>

**Table A2 – 1.1 – Quotations related to Fan Classification.**

Table A2 – 1.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.1. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were classified into a particular fan category.

## 1.2. Social Media Behaviour

C2F1 identifies that he is primarily a passive user of social media. He identifies later in the interview that in the past he would have contributed more to conversations or engaging with content; however, because of negative opinions of this he changed how he used it. This shows that while an individual may have atypical way they use social media (actively or passively) they are capable of changing between the two. In terms of using social media in relation to sport, he states that he would follow results of matches and look for content regarding goals. In relation to the platforms that C2F2 discusses, he states Facebook would be his primary choice (on a daily basis) whereas Twitter is less commonly used. He does not identify himself as being a passive or active user of social media.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I would be more of a user than a contributor in my opinion...I would use it to gather information rather than to promote a message of my own.” (C2F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“So if I were to follow the results of matches I can’t attend, I would use their Facebook page, as really after every game they post up content of their own website they advertise. It’s usually a biased opinion thing but it gives you good content on the goals, it gives you content on the, on the cards, and different things like that. Also I would check out the local news online, for example the Telegraph. They really do follow it in detail...and also using applications that attract the football scores.” (C2F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yeah, I would – Facebook would be my main platform to use; however, Twitter is something I would do maybe 2 to 3 times a week whereas Facebook is daily.” (C2F2)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A2 – 1.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Behaviour.**

Table A2 – 1.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.2. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents used social media.

### 1.3. Social Media Value

In relation to value from social media, C2F1 states that he primarily uses it to gather information. C2F2 also utilises C2's social media to receive information. Additionally, he states that he prefers video content when it's available as it is more interesting. He also identifies another issue as inconstancy between the platforms and what content is available on each. C2F1 describes some of the value he receives from social media as "hype". This is a form of experience that would occur at a match day event, highlighting the link between the offline experience of football and online values. C2F2 states that banter between fans is another source of value, highlighting that there are social values experienced by C2F2 through social media.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Where I would go to get information for the line ups before the game...it would usually be the social media page, but sometimes they are inconsistent with promoting that." (C2F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>"I use Twitter as well. It's quite interesting though to see that C2 don't really integrate their communication strategy across both platforms it seems they have more content on Facebook than there is on Twitter." (C2F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>"Whenever I'm using social media I would be interested in the post-match analysis of how the game went: what they did wrong, what they did right. Also, before the game the hype, and I'm interested in seeing who is going to be playing. I'm interested in seeing maybe what events are going on around that match." (C2F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"You would see a lot of information coming through sources like match of the day or something like that, that give video content rather than just written analysis. I think that's more interesting." (C2F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>"Long-term viewing when I'm on social media really is information about training; it's going to be information about scores; it's going to be information about individual player profile; how he</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>contributed to a game; player analysis; even to the exact detail of player position on the pitch.” (C2F1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Banter over social media can be entertaining to say the least. Usually it’s good to see contrasting viewpoints – you get to see different opinions on a game and what each group of supporters are interested in.” (C2F2)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A2 – 1.3 – Quotations related to Social Media Value.**

Table A2 – 1.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.3. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents experienced value through their social media use.

#### **1.4. Motives to Engage**

One of the motives for C2F1 to engage with content is if he has a personal interest in it. He identifies that this could be links with a player he had a positive opinion of. This shows that levels of attachment exhibited from a fan of a club or player can lead to content being engaged with, supporting the idea that individuals with a higher level of loyalty to a club will be more likely to engage with social media content on a consistent basis. He also states that there are reasons why he would not engage with content, being that it can impact on his personal image. He also identifies other factors that content must have in order for him to engage with such as shock and interest. C2F2 indicates that he is motivated to engage with social media content if it is related to a ‘big game’. This may be to encourage banter among fans, an earlier identified form of social media value he experiences.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Motives to Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Yeah to me it’s about the teams I follow direct directly. That would be the content I would share. Also the other thing that would encourage me is perhaps former players now playing for another team that you became interested in, and you thought they were a great player - you would still have your following of those individuals.” (C2F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I feel like you can be too serious on social media then it can portray a negative image of oneself because it’s supposed to be all about entertainment and fun you know?” (C2F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Really, it’s the shock factor to it that makes you want to share because you want other people to know about it because it is exciting and it is</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>something which is different to the expectation really.” (C2F1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I went through a period of where I would share more serious content and give my opinion on things and it was negatively thought upon - it was frowned upon amongst some other Facebook users, which made me become quite hesitant to actually post to Facebook for a period of time or share content.” (C2F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I would retweet it if it’s maybe a big game. For example C2 is coming up to play Carrick Rangers here in the Irish league final and with the look of the game, it’s something I definitely I would be interested in sharing it’s something I would like to attend.” (C2F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If something shocks me that’s, what’s going to encourage me to share. If something out of the normal happened that’s what is going to be an incentive to share. If I were to share just every score or every update it would become a bit saturated and people would lose interest in it. I keep the information that I share to relevant and concise to a certain extent.” (C2F1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A2 – 1.4 – Quotations related to Motives to Engage.**

Table A2 – 1.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.4. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were motivated to engage with social media content.

## **2.0.Stage Two Club Interviews**

This section presents the findings from club representative interviews conducted to meet RO2 and RO3. In total, one in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted in the case of C2

### **2.1.Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources**

C2’s social media manager discussed how he was company secretary at the time of social media adoption within the club, around 2010. The club primarily use Facebook and Twitter as their social media channels; they said that there was a decision made not to use Instagram, a channel which is mentioned several times during fan interviews. This was predominantly due to an issue regarding their access to quality images to post on the medium, and having a desire to avoid having poor quality on

one of their social media channels. In addition this shows a recognition of the club that there is the potential for damage to their brand image.

C2 has one of the larger social media teams compared to other clubs, with five people involved in the day to day running of the social media itself. This has the potential to cause issues for brand consistency when social media is used for marketing communications. This issue is recognised by C2's social media manager, describing their social media as "fragmented in terms of messages".

Topic	Evidence
Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"I think we brought in, we looked whenever I was company secretary from 2010 to 2013 and I think around that time is where we implemented both Facebook and Twitter...Facebook first followed by Twitter in circa 2010. So my involvement has been consistent for the past 7 years, one of the forerunners at our club and then building the sort of team around myself." (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"Well there's 5 plus the general website manager—he has permissions to post website articles and things that are linked directly to the web, but he wouldn't get involved in the day to day activity of the social media team." (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"All 5 people aren't dedicated to the one responsibility, hence why it is split up a bit which I'm sure we'll probably dig into a bit more - but is fragmented in terms of messages." (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"We took a conscious decision not to pursue Instagram at this point in time. We didn't feel that we had access to a volume of photographs and images that would reflect the club." (C2R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A2 – 2.1 – Quotations related to Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources.**

Table A2 – 2.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.1. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described their role, the social media channels used at the club, and the available resources.

## **2.2. Social Media Objectives and Purpose**

The primary objective of C2 when using social media is as a communications channel. It is described during the interview as "a massive communication tool", which is indicating that it would be used to target a large audience. C2 identify that the primary purpose was to attract and increase attendance levels at the club – showing clear

marketing objectives. However, there may not have been an underlying strategy in place to achieve this goal. Furthermore, it is identified that the club use social media for communication as their overall goal, but have no specific objectives surrounding this.

More specifically, when discussing how social media is used to communicate with fans, C2's social media manager states it is used for supporter awareness of information regarding fixtures, and goes on to say that it has become the core channel by which supporters will get information.

In relation to facilitating revenue generation through social media use, C2's social media manager notes that a lack of know-how in how to achieve this at a practical level has an impact on developing objectives around it. It is evident from this reference that clubs want to realise monetary value from social media has an overarching goal, but lack the strategy or resources to take advantage of it.

Another reason why C2 struggle to set marketing related objectives is due to the requirement for all members of the team to buy into these objectives to achieve them. The social media manager identifies examples of this such as issues in consistency of posts, mentioning how they are written in terms of style. C2's social media manager also recognises the difficulty of setting objectives, in that it is hard to quantify the impact that interaction/engagement would have if there is no data collection, thus reducing desire to set goals. Further to this, C2's social media manager identifies that all members of the team have the goal of communication when using social media; however, determines that the shared vision breaks down over the importance of interaction and consistency in what is posted. He also identifies that this may be due to lack of "professional awareness" which can be attributed to the members of the team being volunteers, and not necessarily having relevant marketing or business experience.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Objectives and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>"We saw the potential that it was a massive communication tool and I suppose the reason was to – maybe not as much communication actually, but I suppose in attracting – the main purpose for me anyway in the inception of it was to attract and increase attendances." (C2R1)</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Certainly for supporter awareness of fixtures and using information that was going on our website that was replicated, and then over time it’s social media itself that has developed into a core communication tool, and a core source of where our supporters go for their information.” (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think there is a lacking in any commercial know-how to really monetise that. It’s just something that I would have always liked to get my teeth into but the situation hasn’t really allowed for.” (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“It is seen as a branch of communication for their high level goals – which to be honest I am not privy to at this point in time myself, so...I think it’s an extension of facilitating that, but not having its own distinct set of goals or objectives.” (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I can set these objectives and set these targets, but unless the whole team buys into those...I wouldn’t say it’s pointless but it becomes a ‘banging your head off a brick wall’ exercise where you fail to have that consistency in publishing material. If the language isn’t the same, if the style of writing, or the style of using certain platforms, or scheduling isn’t there...I could probably set my own objectives for liking or sharing, but without the data collection side of it at the end, what is the benefit? It’s very, very hard to monetise or turn into quantitative data.” (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“At the core communicating information is key to everyone’s heart and I think we’ve got quite good at that, and there’s not really much goes on in the club without some sort of online representation...where I would say that were on different pages, is the importance of certain bits, or the importance of interaction, or the importance of presentation and consistency. And that probably feeds from just a lack of professional awareness as to the impact of social media actions.” (C2R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A2 – 2.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Objectives and Purpose.**

Table A2 – 2.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.2. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described the social media objectives and purpose for its use within the club.

### **2.3. Club Use of Social Media**

C2’s social media manager states that the club have set no strict guidelines for social media use. This could attribute to the fragmented way in which social media is utilised



in C2. C2's social media manager refers to their social media as "self-policing", identifying that with such a long time in using social media there is a sense among the social media team of a shared ideology or knowledge with the club as to how it should be used. The closest thing to a plan or strategy in C2 is a timeline of when certain types of content will be posted. C2's social media manager describes the approach to social media use as being "reactive".

C2's social media manager mentions the desire for engagement with content and states that Facebook in particular is where the most engagement seems to occur in the forms of comments and supporters talking. He also acknowledges that poor timing when releasing content, or not having a need for engagement from fans has a negative impact on its viewership. He states that a key type of content that encourages engagement is video – but identifies the club are lacking in this because they do not have the resources to produce a lot of it. It is also explained that content with imagery conveying a positive brand image of C2 encourages fans to both interact, and attend because it can counteract the negative stereotypes of semi-professional football. This identifies clear links between communication of brand image in sport, and that it may be an important characteristic of marketing communications on social media in semi-professional sport.

C2's social media manager proposes that as a social media team they do want to create and provide content that will encourage people to attend a game. This further highlights that there is an underlying desire for revenue-based value and purpose in their social media use, and recognition of match attendance as a potentially key objective. Again, this also links this back to engaging content where he describes sharing of club content from regular fans, filtering to lapsed fans through social networks in order to generate interest in attending matches.

Topic	Evidence
Club Use of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"With 7 plus years of experience there is a general consensus of that the club and the social media team being on the same wavelength in terms of what is put out there and what is really correct at the club."</i> (C2R1)</li> <li>• <i>"I think certainly with Facebook, which is probably where engagement really can push content forward – we try and engage, and try and get more supporters involved and talking with things,</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>because it's very clear if we have something that's posted at the wrong time, or posted without any sort of real need for engagement, it doesn't get the viewership that it probably merits." (C2R1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"What I try and do is put a message out there that encourages fans to go to the game, to try and tap into what would make people want to go to the game – we try and run Facebook events for our home games and try and encourage existing fans to try and share with other lapsed fans, or maybe just fans that aren't as regular." (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"We don't really have a lot of video content, but when we do have video content it works very well. We just don't have the resources to produce a lot of video content – when we do that it certainly works well, but I think the key thing is imagery – I think if we can – I think to the lapsed fan or to the person who has maybe never been to a C2 game, it's...there's maybe this underlying view it's just park football. It's nonsense – I think when you can show good graphics and imagery, and photographs of what has now become a professional looking outfit – professional looking players, well presented teams in a good stadium, I think that does really – that's the image that we want to put out of the club and the natural image of it...but it is something that really seems to resonate better than just a post with nothing really attached to it." (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>"There's more of an unwritten timeline of what we do, there's certain core elements to making sure that we do the updates on Twitter of the match, we do publish the match report more promptly, we publish match previews promptly." (C2R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A2 – 2.3 – Quotations related to Club Use of Social Media.**

Table A2 – 2.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.3. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described how the club were using social media currently.

#### **2.4. Club Social Media Value**

C2's social media manager identifies that while the value of social media as a communications tool has been recognised by the club, there is still a greater level of potential to promote their "commercial offerings" via these channels. This is further evidence supporting the recognition of revenue as an overarching goal for social media

use within the club. C2's social media manager also identifies that this will come with improved planning and strategy.

One way in which value is being realised by C2 is discussed through fans "checking themselves in" to matches on events pages on social media. Through this, fans are engaging with content and providing value to the club through raising awareness. They are also experiencing value for themselves through social benefits and self-identification or attachment to the club. In terms of experiencing engagement, C2's social media manager states that it may occur more commonly on Twitter.

Topic	Evidence
Club Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"There's certainly an appetite from the club that they know the importance of it – they know how big a strength it is as a communication tool – but I think that there's an opportunity there, that people – if there is a change in mentality, that they can provide – if its engrained with all the commercial offerings that we have, it can be better used to promote that – and better used strategically with better planning."</i> (C2R1)</li> <li>• <i>"What I've noticed works is the event pages allow people to check in at the match and tag their friends at the match and that has subsequent coverage, and since we've been doing that, people have been taking that up a lot more and it becomes a sort of badge of honour to be checking themselves in at the match and engaging with other people when doing so. So engaging with the content I suppose there would be a lot more of that on Twitter."</i> (C2R1)</li> </ul>

**Table A2 – 2.4 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Value.**

Table A2 – 2.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.4. These quotations provide information on how the club representative interpreted the value which the club was experiencing from its social media use.

## 2.5. Social Media Issues

C2's social media manager also identifies the issue of using volunteers without professional experience on their social media channels. It is further noted that finding people with this expertise from a wider context, or different backgrounds might help improve social media at the club, through improving the quality of resources that are available. In addition to this, as with many other clubs, a lack of available capital or

budget is a major issue when trying to use social media. C2's social media manager also states that time is an issue for their ability to plan ahead, and states it as a reason for being reactive in their approach to social media. He ends by saying that the club lack the skillset and a real strategy behind what is put on social media.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Obviously if we’re looking at part time volunteers with no commercial or online expertise, we really just have to look at those who do have that, in a much larger professional scale, and just try and pick what we can use and build from that.” (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think lack of money is one that is probably – there’s a reluctant acceptance that were not going to have a budget or any real budget to do a lot of promotion.” (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think time constraint, if I go back to being reactive, time is something that people don’t really – there might be ideas to get off the ground, or things that people want to do, and then because of the certain reactive nature, they don’t really think the whole end to end process through, and it doesn’t really get fulfilled either at all, or to the best of its potential.” (C2R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“There’s a lot of good intention but it lacks the planning, it lacks the skillset, it lacks real strategy behind what we do at times.” (C2R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A2 – 2.5 – Quotations related to Social Media Issues.**

Table A2 – 2.5 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.5. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described issues they experienced in their use of social media at the club.

### **3.0.Summary of Findings**

C2F1 is classed as a Social Devotee due to his level of attendance and primary reason for attendance stated as socialising. He identifies his key values in social media being information, and social interaction between fans. He states that he engages with content that is of personal interest to himself, and that he engages with content based on his level of attachment to the club. C2F2 is a Casual Follower of C2. He states that his primary value from social media is information, but notes that video content increases the value he experiences. C2 did not have specific objectives related to social media at the club, identifying a lack of strategy. There is recognition that social media

can be used to commercialise the club; however, a lack of resources are available such as marketing expertise and time required to accomplish this.

## Appendix Three: Case Four – C4

The case study of C4 had one focus group with fans of the club. One in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with the social media manager at C4. C4 was case four of eight, and referred to as C4.

### 1.0. Stage One: Fan Interviews

This section presents the findings from fan interviews conducted to meet RO1 and RO3. In total, one focus group was conducted in the case of C4

#### 1.1. Fan Classification

When discussing level of attendance, C4F1 identifies that he cannot attend every match due to family commitments, and states that there is an inability to attend away matches caused by this. Because of the number of matches he can attend being limited, C4F1 fits into the category of Fan. Similarly, C4F2 also does not attend away matches and fits into the same category. C4F2 also identified that he was a “Lifetime Member” of C4, meaning he didn’t need to purchase a ticket for attendance, and as such even increasing his level of attendance at matches would not result in an increase in gate receipts for the club. C4F3 attends the majority of matches and can be seen as a Committed Supporter.

Topic	Evidence
Fan Classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I’d be there every week near enough – I would miss – I think I missed maybe about 5 or 6 this year.” (C4F2)</li><li>• “Well I only went to 2 away games I think.” (C2F1)</li><li>• “I was at most of last year too. I actually think that even though I wasn’t a full member I was at the match more often last year.” (C4F3)</li></ul>

**Table A3 – 1.1 – Quotations related to Fan Classification.**

Table A3 – 1.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.1. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were classified into a particular fan category.

## 1.2. Social Media Behaviour

All three respondents discuss using Twitter more regularly as opposed to Facebook for following C4. C4F1 states that he uses it primarily when not at the match for information. In relation to level of use, he states it is the first thing he does in the morning – he uses social media to search for news regarding C4. C4F2 also uses Twitter primarily, in order to follow the matches that he cannot attend. C4F3 identifies that she doesn't have a Twitter account but still follows the club on it through a feed on the club's website.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>"You know it's only on match days on Twitter I would be looking if I'm not at the game – looking for updates – score updates that sort of thing." (C4F1)</i></li><li>• <i>"I was on it on Saturday when they were away as I don't go to the away matches - don't travel." (C4F2)</i></li><li>• <i>"I check Twitter but I don't have a Twitter account – I would have checked it a lot more before I started going to the matches." (C4F3)</i></li><li>• <i>"I put my Twitter on – type in Crues to see if there is any news – even just to see what other supporters are saying – first thing – that's the first thing as soon as I get up." (C4F1)</i></li></ul>

**Table A3 – 1.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Behaviour.**

Table A3 – 1.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.2. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents used social media.

## 1.3. Social Media Value

C4F2 discusses many of the values he sees through social media. Primarily he seeks out different forms of information regarding the team. He uses it primarily for matches he cannot attend therefore score updates are important. He also identifies that the detail in match previews from the club provide benefit. He discusses using social media to follow other teams in the league as well. Further to this, he identifies that he uses it for banter with fans of these teams, highlighting the social value that can be experienced

through the channel. As a fan, he recognises the social media can be used to get more people attending matches, and increasing revenue for the club.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Follow the scores - so Twitter is good for that – people getting the score updates.” (C4F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I know – his match previews are quite good – he does put a bit of work into them but it is quite random when it’s going on.” (C4F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I still would go on and get updates to the C3 game - see how all the other teams are doing - or if we’re playing C7 I would maybe post something to try and banter – I’ve friends at C7 who are maybe reading my Twitter feed.” (C4F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“There is always a bit of speculation and rumour on it you know and it’s good to read that and see what everybody else is thinking about it.” (C4F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“But it is really a good forum for football fans for interaction – where are you getting the money to sign him and all this.” (C4F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I agree and it’s good to keep the fans updated. But as I said earlier on, how do you use that to get more people paying through the gate?” (C4F2)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A3 – 1.3 – Quotations related to Social Media Value.**

Table A3 – 1.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.3. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents experienced value through their social media use.

#### **1.4. Motives to Engage**

C4F1 identifies that he engages with content if he wants his friends on Facebook to see it. This shows that there is recognition of the impact of shared content at social media. He also highlights that this occurs if the content is related to something happening at C4, showing his attachment to the club and wanting to portray this over social media. C4F2 identifies that sharing content on social media could lead to more potential fans coming to the stadium and generating capital. He states that he would engage with content if it was to develop support through social media. This shows his level of allegiance to the club and how he wants to benefit the club through his social media use.



Topic	Evidence
Motives to Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I always wonder how do you get the likes of yourself who is maybe interested in football but doesn’t really go – how do they use social media to get the like of you to say ‘come on you should come down to this game – you’ll really enjoy it – you’re a football fan – we’re a progressive club you should be down here’. I haven’t even got the answer how to get - is it just as simple to get more people to share their posts or how do you get it out there more?” (C4F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If there was something on at our club I would share it with my Facebook so my Facebook friends would see it.” (C4F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I would share it too, but I probably would share most of the time...just not sure what the answer is...to build actual support through social media.” (C4F2)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A3 – 1.4 – Quotations related to Motives to Engage.**

Table A3 – 1.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.4. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were motivated to engage with social media content.

## **2.0. Stage Two Club Interviews**

This section presents the findings from club representative interviews conducted to meet RO2 and RO3. In total, one in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted in the case of C4

### **2.1. Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources**

After reviewing their social media processes for an upcoming event, C4’ social media manager realised that their social media was all operated by one individual. The respondent in this interview was brought in to take charge of Twitter and Facebook when necessary. Facebook and Twitter are the two primary channels used by the club; however, C4 have also started trying to use Snapchat and Instagram, but have discussed several difficulties with this. Firstly, there are only two people using social media at the club; therefore, there is a lack of available volunteers (and subsequently

time). Secondly, there are issues identified with getting information out of people at the club to put on these channels. This illustrates internal organisational difficulties that are causing issues for marketing communications.

Topic	Evidence
Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The social media side of the club was run by one person on all forums so that Twitter, Facebook the heap; so it identified a need for somebody else to take it on and for other people to help out – so basically I’m in charge of the club’s Twitter and I would do Facebook if the other guy isn’t there.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“We are trying to get Snapchat and Instagram on the go but obviously with only being two...it’s very, very secretive around the club so it’s very hard to get any information from people.” (C4R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A3 – 2.1 – Quotations related to Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources.**

Table A3 – 2.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.1. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described their role, the social media channels used at the club, and the available resources.

## 2.2. Social Media Objectives and Purpose

The club’s use of social media was reviewed after a club initiative was put in place, referred to as ‘Raise the Bar’ (RTB). The intent of this was to increase attendances and give the image of the stadium being a family friendly place. With the offline initiative, C4’ board realised the need for social media to be used as a marketing communications channel to be used synergistically with RTB, and convey the desired brand image of the club. When discussing individual objectives for social media in the club, C4’ social media manager states he wants to get new fans through the door instead of losing fans. He uses the phrase “try to promote the club as best as I can” identifying that promotion and awareness are key factors in this success, and can therefore be seen as objectives of the club. When discussing objectives, he states that they want to promote the club more and engage more, but that nothing more specific has been set.

C4’ social media manager explains they see fan interaction as the primary goal of the social media channels, and to provide these fans with information. These can be linked

with the provision of fan value. He also states that the club want social media used to get people “in” – referring to match attendance. C4 recognise the marketing value of social media and have a desire to increase revenue through its use. He also wants to target both existing and new fans with social media, acknowledging the potential of the channel to achieve this.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Objectives and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The RTB was basically an initiative to try and get more fans into the ground; trying to get more kids involved to, so they wanted to make C4 a family place; so there was a tent installed – like a marquee tent. There’s different events ran in it like ‘Target football’ for the kids – the Gibson cup was there obviously because we were the champions at the time – so we showcased it.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“...mainly done on Twitter and Facebook – I would have put it on Twitter and the other guy would have copied it over to Facebook for me. It was also on leaflets/flyers but the majority was social media. Well it could have been more publicised but that’s another – that’s a learning curve for this year.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Trying to get the fans back in you know instead of losing fans – get new fans. My aim just really is just try and promote the club as best as I can.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The club’s main view is to try and just – it’s fan interaction really – just try and get people in, and answer people’s questions. Try and show a bit of history; try to show highlights if they didn’t get to the game. You know – try and give them an insight – if it’s game day what’s happening.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think this year we are trying to sort out a bit more – promote a bit more – get more in depth and actually engage the club a bit...At the minute, no real specific objectives form the club other than ‘do what you’re doing’.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“My social media thing would be for a mix of fans. I think the most important thing is keep the current fans, but at the same time try and promote the fact that, you know, let’s get new ones in.” (C4R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A3 – 2.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Objectives and Purpose.**

Table A3 – 2.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.2. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described the social media objectives and purpose for its use within the club.

### 2.3. Club Use of Social Media

There is a flexible approach to social media use in place. C4' social media manager identifies that there are certain things are done on certain days (match day commentary, scores etc.) but that he prefers to keep it flexible to allow for interaction. He also notes that timing of posts can impact the level of interaction gained. Further to this, C4 have started using hashtags in order to gain interaction and engagement from fans – this is classed as a form of match day promotion by C4' social media manager. In addition, he wants better promotion for the changes being made on social media, through using offline promotion to have an impact on their online following of channels. In other words the desire is to raise awareness from fans that attend matches; those being the loyal fans that are more likely to engage with social media content (such as hashtags). In relation to marketing, C4' social media manager identifies that they will be using social media to push new pricing promotions within the club. This shows a direct use of social media as a marketing communications channel to raise awareness and generate interest in attending matches.

In terms of measuring success of social media content, C4' social media manager identifies that looking at number of views of a certain post, or level of interaction (likes, retweets, and comments) are how to measure what has been done effectively. Some strategic approach is taken here, as he furthers the statement by stating that content which gets a lot of interaction or views is what they should focus on doing more often, and content which doesn't gets stopped.

Topic	Evidence
Club Use of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“For me I would say it’s probably very flexible because I have certain things I can do on certain days. With the likes of ‘Tweet Deck’ it’s handy because I can do everything in one day if I wanted to, but obviously time constraints... I just try to be as flexible as possible – just making sure that I know certain things have to be out by certain times. You know based on interaction as well - what I know to be the better interaction times – what I have posted at certain times.” (C4R1)</i></li><li>• <i>“We started this year putting out a couple of days before, like a preview – who we were playing, what</i></li></ul>

	<p>time and, the picture of the previous game. You know with a hashtag...club's official # or a different # - you know – trying to get people to re-tweet it and it did – it was successful – like a match promo per say.” (C4R1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We’ll see how it goes for the full season – more promoting with us as well so, we’re getting jumpers, t-shirts stuff made for us, so that when we’re around the ground- people know about this stuff like there’s the hashtag, there’s the hashtag for Twitter and Facebook. You know what I mean; they can see what we do clearer whereas at the minute there’s nothing there at the ground other than a couple of posters that are washed out.” (C4R1)</li> <li>• “There’s a whole season, the new season ticket prices and stuff are coming out and obviously we’re trying to get fans in with the introductory deals; it’s trying to push that maybe and that will hopefully bring in a few new fans.” (C4R1)</li> <li>• “I don’t set myself targets per se, but that would be how I track my progress - on how many hits do I get on a poll, or how many re-tweets do I get on certain tweets; how many likes do I get. What are the things people are liking and re-tweeting? Trying to keep with that sort of information so we can do it again – promote it a bit further. And then it’s the sort of things you don’t get too much on and stop doing.” (C4R1)</li> </ul>
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**Table A3 – 2.3 – Quotations related to Club Use of Social Media.**

Table A3 – 2.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.3. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described how the club were using social media currently.

#### **2.4. Club Social Media Value**

C4’ social media manager has identified an impact on attendances from using social media, stating he has seen “some new faces”. He also notes that their use of social media can be improved in this area through utilising it more effectively on bigger game days, and has an idea of the need for data collection and analysis, referencing that gate receipts need analysed to see the impact of the initiative.

In relation to raising awareness, C4’ social media manager has noticed success from social media, and how the campaigns have spread. He provides examples of both RTB and a ‘Kids for a Quid’ campaign that have had a positive impact on attendance at

matches. Any success gained from this via social media was through the raised awareness among their audience. He also identifies this as another key value the club have seen: improved communication with fans.

C4' social media manager explains that there is value in fans being able to share information (a characteristic of social media) and not just receiving the information directly from the club. This sharing benefits from use of imagery in content and interaction. He further links this with excitement and suggests that retweeting/sharing fan content is a way of engaging with the fans, and provides them with reciprocal value.

Topic	Evidence
Club Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“For the likes of the kids and fans yeah it was great – some old faces and some new faces started to come in a bit more. I think what we really could do is start doing it on a bigger game day because some small game days you won’t get that many away fans anyway... I think it’s just a case of analysing gate receipts and seeing what happens – see how many more you can bring in into the ground on busier days.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Based on the whole RTB campaign and the way things work with a lot of our volunteers and families, word of mouth spread. There is an initiative ‘kids for a quid’ it went really well – it brought people in from all over – all different schools as well – we invited schools down, brought everybody in, it seems a bit more of them are coming back based on that – rather than paying full price.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think obviously being able to share information on social media is great. There’s also the platform to share it in a different way other than just talking to somebody or texting somebody... you can use pictures, GIFs, emojis – you know try to interact... Give somebody a bit more exciting thing other than just reading what you are writing.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Communication within the club and communication with the fans to let them know that there is such benefit of social media.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yeah, I think they do too because if they get re-tweeted then they are like ‘happy days somebody appreciates my opinion or my view’ - enough to post it on the official page.” (C4R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A3 – 2.4 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Value.**

Table A3 – 2.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.4. These quotations provide information on how the club representative interpreted the value which the club was experiencing from its social media use.

## 2.5. Social Media Issues

C4' social media manager identifies time as a major issue in terms of the social media and sees working on this as a major way for improving the clubs social media. He states the addition of more volunteers and more efficient internal communication in C4 regarding information that can be conveyed to fans via social media. C4 are lacking a social media budget, so the volunteers in charge of social media at C4 cannot try to use paid advertising – something which may be beneficial to them based on their goals of increasing awareness and attendances through social media. The issues clubs are facing with social media are all fairly similar; some have greater issues with limited resources than others in particular when discussing the number of volunteers available.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I think there are the time constraints – certain people need certain jobs. I think we need more on the team and I think a few more people will need to start opening up within the club and giving us more information that we want instead of having to pry and pry until it eventually comes out. Basically, at the minute I know nothing about transfer news; whereas if anything comes out on Twitter at the minute it's not even me that's tweeting it.” (C4R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“You see for paid advertising – again, that is something that is out of my grade. I can't make a decision on making something paid because that's what we are trying to do this year. We're trying to get more involved – trying to get them more involved – the club more involved with the social media side of things – let us have a budget to allow us to do things like that.” (C4R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A3 – 2.5 – Quotations related to Social Media Issues.**

Table A3 – 2.5 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.5. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described issues they experienced in their use of social media at the club.

## 3.0. Summary of Findings

Three fans were interviewed for case four. C4 C4F1 and C4F2 both fit into the category of Fan, while fan three was a Committed Supporter of the club. All three fans used the club's social media for information. When discussing engagement, C4F1 identified that he engaged with content to make his network of connections aware of the information. C4F2 identified an interest in using social media to encourage more people to attend. C4 identified weaknesses in their social media through lack of volunteers, and brought in additional staff to correct this. There is recognition of the importance of brand image on social media. The primary value for C4 has been in using social media to raise awareness. There are still issues with lack of time and budget identified.



## Appendix Four: Case Five – C5

The case study of C5 had 2 in-depth interviews with fans of the club. One in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with the social media manager at C5. C5 was case five of eight, and referred to as C5.

### 1.0. Stage One: Fan Interviews

This section presents the findings from fan interviews conducted to meet RO1 and RO3. In total, two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in the case of C5

#### 1.1. Fan Classification

C5F1 states that he currently attends several games per season putting him in the category of social devotee. He states his primary reason for currently attending as a family member playing for the team, and family as having been his primary reason for becoming a supporter. C5F1 has moved between the categories of Social Devotee and Casual Follower. He states that he has never been a season ticket holder, but his family have been. C5F2 is classed as a Casual Follower of C5 due to his limited attendance at matches.

Topic	Evidence
Fan Classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“More when I was a kid...through my teenage years I had other things going on, but over the past couple of seasons my little cousin Joel Cooper started to feature in the first team squad, so I would attend matches more frequently to support him.” (C5F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“Since I was about 5 years old. I remember going to games with my grandfather. He had been a supporter pretty much all of his life....so yeah about 20 years.” (C5F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“I don’t attend too often anymore – maybe a few games per season” (C5F2)</i></li><li>• <i>“I would go to Windsor Park because some of my family are also big C7 fans....so it’s a bit of a divided family in that way. So Windsor Park could be classed as a home game also, but it would mainly be Windsor Park and Mourneview Park would be the two grounds I would attend.” (C5F2)</i></li></ul>

**Table A4 – 1.1 – Quotations related to Fan Classification.**

Table A4 – 1.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.1. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were classified into a particular fan category.

## 1.2. Social Media Behaviour

C5F1 identifies that his two primary platforms for social media use are Twitter and Facebook, in particular when discussing which he uses for following C5. C5F2 states that he uses Instagram, which in his opinion the NIFL clubs “have not really taken over”. He feels the value on Instagram from NIFL clubs isn’t very high, highlighting an area for improvement for clubs. He states that Twitter is a platform that is effective for news and therefore receiving information from clubs.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“It would mainly be on Twitter and Facebook.” (C5F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I would have Instagram ...but especially, I know Premier League clubs don’t really focus their social media power on Instagram, it would mainly be Twitter and Facebook. So Irish League clubs definitely haven’t really taken over Instagram just yet.” (C5F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I would mainly use it for keeping in touch with people, with the messenger app. But I guess I would mainly get my news from social media – especially Twitter, I would get my news from social media.” (C5F1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A4 – 1.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Behaviour.**

Table A4 – 1.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.2. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents used social media.

## 1.3. Social Media Value

In relation to the value received from social media, C5F1 identifies that his primary value will be in information from the club. C5F2 also discusses information being a primary value from social media, and discusses how coverage of matches is important for him – and the level of detail within these. A reason why this may be important to C5F2 is due to not attending a large amount of matches per season; therefore, he will receive more value from match coverage than fans who are attending on a more regular

basis. This indicates that allegiance level to the club could have a reversed effect on value from match coverage, in that more loyal fans receive less value from it as they are at matches more. When discussing areas for improved value from C5, he states that more “exciting” content would be important. When comparing NIFL to professional football, C5F2 states that highlights of goals would provide value to fans.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“It would mainly be in-depth reports and updates on live matches that are going on – I like to know, even if C5 were to get a corner, I think that should be covered in the updates on Twitter and the Twitter feed. And I know they’re really trying to make an effort with their coverage of the matches, but also whenever like there’s transfer speculation, and reports on injuries, and things like that – things that the premier league clubs are really good at, I think that the Irish league clubs need to...look to what the premier league clubs are doing, and sort of tune their own Twitter feeds to replicate that, because I don’t think enough is being focused on social media with Irish league.” (C5F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think that if people – if people are going to be following a Twitter feed from C5 then they are obviously very interested in the club...and they’re obviously maybe upset that they can’t attend the match themselves, so they’re going to want to know what is going on in the game. So I think details if they get a corner, who gets booked, substitutions – I think that that information would be appreciated by those who follow the Twitter feed.” (C5F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think they need to be a bit more exciting in their social media activity.” (C5F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Any time there’s a big result, they would immediately show highlights of the games – as soon as they legally can I guess. I think that’s something that could be improved in the Irish league as well – people want to see the goals and it’s maybe not as accessible for fans of the Irish league, but straight away after a Premier League match you can see the highlights.” (C5F2)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A4 – 1.3 – Quotations related to Social Media Value.**

Table A4 – 1.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.3. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents experienced value through their social media use.

#### 1.4. Motives to Engage

C5F1 identifies that a primary motive for him interacting with content on social media is if it is related to his family that plays for the club. He also states that more specifically it will surround goals, or the individual playing well. This is related to his attachment to the team, as his family member is part of the team. While C5F1 discussed limited value in terms of excitement from C5's social media content, C5F2 identifies photographs of players as being potentially exciting – something which motives him to engage with the content. C5F1 relates images with “exciting” content.

Topic	Evidence
Motives to Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“There was a goal he scored at The Oval against C6 that was very reminiscent of Eric Cantona’s chip at Old Trafford, and it got quite a lot of attention across social media...it actually made a news channel over in Australia which was quite impressive....so I retweeted that and I definitely interacted with that – but any time Joel would score or play well I would interact and I would just...I guess let people know that I was rooting for my cousin.” (C5F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“If there was an exciting photo of a player that had just signed for the club – I don’t know. I think that’s mainly the thing with social media that people are looking for.” (C5F2)</i></li></ul>

**Table A4 – 1.4 – Quotations related to Motives to Engage.**

Table A4 – 1.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.4. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were motivated to engage with social media content.

#### 2.0. Stage Two Club Interviews

This section presents the findings from club representative interviews conducted to meet RO2 and RO3. In total, one in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted in the case of C5

##### 2.1. Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources

C5 have a team of four individuals who are in charge of the social media accounts at the club. The social media manager also states that he has stood in as a “web master” as well when necessary – this shows the nature of having to fulfil multiple roles in a

voluntary capacity at these clubs, further highlighting the severe resource restrictions that can exist, even if numbers of volunteers are in abundance. In terms of social media channels, currently the club use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. It is highlighted that Instagram is used primarily for images and not interaction with fans.

An interesting point raised by C5's social media manager is that they have identified more interaction from fans on the content posted on their Facebook as opposed to Twitter. In attempting to explain why this may be the case, the social media manager identifies that because he sees a wider range of people on Facebook, there may be more people that are increasingly likely to interact with content. A reason for stating that Facebook has more interaction is that C5's social media manager does not count likes and retweets as forms of interaction. They directly link comments to interaction rather than grouping more forms of engagement in with this (likes, shares or other interaction that results in the content reaching more people within social networks).

Topic	Evidence
Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“There is a team of us so there’s a team of an additional three other people who would tweet from the matches as well, so there’s four of us in total. However, I would do the main duties and such in terms of looking after the page.” (C5R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“However, the FB to be honest with you is probably a bigger scope and a wider scope in terms of the reactions and the interaction to posts – you would probably get a lot more on the FB page than on the Twitter page these days.” (C5R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“In terms of FB...it’s probably a much wider range in terms of a lot of more people have a FB page than a Twitter page, so that’s probably another reason why as well.” (C5R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Twitter would be more likes and re-tweets – you would get the odd comment on the Twitter page, but most of the comments and the interactions would be primarily on the FB page in terms of the bigger scope of people that are getting to see the posts. I would say a lot more people would be interactive as well - you would get a lot more messages and queries on the FB page than you would on the Twitter page.” (C5R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The Instagram is there but it’s more in terms of just posting the match day pictures – it wouldn’t be used for any interaction as such.” (C5R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A4 – 2.1 – Quotations related to Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources.**

Table A4 – 2.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.1. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described their role, the social media channels used at the club, and the available resources.

## 2.2. Social Media Objectives and Purpose

Other than discussing an unplanned approach to using social media, C5's social media manager did not name any objectives or goals that the club had set. In relation to their flexible approach on social media, the only other area of discussion was that they had timed posts like many other clubs which provided a structure, on match days in particular.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Objectives and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"I think it's kinda flexible, you know? I mean it would really depend on what's going on. Obviously, this week there's nothing really happening; so, there's not much news there or nothing for me to post this week. We kind of plan what to do in terms of the matches which on a match day would probably be quite active on the morning of the game. So, there would kind of be a set sequence of tweets in terms of the match preview if you were playing at home, obviously thanking the sponsors. The likes of playing away then doing the bus and stuff so, I wouldn't say it's a set plan but it would kinda be the same type of sequence that I would follow on any match day before and after the game."</i> (C5R1)</li> </ul>

**Table A4 – 2.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Objectives and Purpose.**

Table A4 – 2.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.2. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described the social media objectives and purpose for its use within the club.

## 2.3. Club Use of Social Media

In relation to social media usage, C5's social media manager identifies that social media has been used to increase attendance through increasing interest in certain

matches. He implies awareness is a factor in the success of this. That is, through continual posting of content it will remain in people's minds. He also states that fans interact with their friends on social media, inviting them to games. This provides some rationale behind why attendances get increased. In addition, he states that being able to create events on Facebook, and the ability for people to share and invite on this can generate more interest. This shows that C5 are using social media for financial benefit.

A specific area in which this is important is in raising awareness and increasing levels of interest in Friday night fixtures, stating that there is more potential for people to attend, and therefore more effort should be made to get these people to attend. Again, this links back to direct action being taken to increase revenue received by the club through the use of social media. The club also target their social media at everyone who has an interest in the club, not just existing loyal fans.

There are not strict guidelines provided to the social media team. However, C5's social media manager states that using common sense, provides a good starting point for it, and to remember that social media is being used as an official communication channel. This identifies the recognition of a professional image to be conveyed, again highlighting that the club recognise the importance of communicating their brand image.

According to C5's social media manager, the type of information in the social media content will determine how much engagement it gets, and the likelihood that the content will reach a wider audience. This recognition means that clubs can begin to develop a way to provide such content with tailored marketing messages to better achieve their organisations goals. This requires an understanding of the processes by which consumer or fan value becomes engagement.

Topic	Evidence
Club Use of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“We have had quite a lot of big games over the last couple of year so it has been a good way in terms of being able to push attendance and almost drum up interest solely through the use of social media. The more times you post it, the more people that see it,</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>the more it's in their minds, so it also can get a conversation going in terms of people inviting their friends. On Twitter obviously you can't do it but on the FB page you can create and share the event and invite people to the event. So it does drum up interest that way."</i> (C5R1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"It would be more for the ones you are trying to push, if the games keep getting switched to a Friday night - the game has been switched by the club to a Friday night game because they think that there's a gauge to get better attendance at a Friday fixture than it would be for the Saturday fixture, so it is quite important and if that is the case to get that drummed up in terms of the interest."</i> (C5R1)</li> <li>• <i>"It is an official channel line so you do need to make sure that when you are posting anything it's not offensive, or if anybody's going to take distaste to what you are posting because you are posting as the voice of the club as opposed to yourself. When you're doing the play by play in matches you do need to make sure that you do toe the line - so there wouldn't be really any guidelines set, but as I said there is common sense."</i> (C5R1)</li> <li>• <i>"I mean there would be people you would see commenting on the social media that you do know; but there would be other people, might be a fair weather fan. But it would be more targeted at everybody who has some sort of interest in the club."</i> (C5R1)</li> <li>• <i>"In terms of what that information is. For example, is the post about a player signing or a player signing a new contract? It's going to get more interaction than – and more likes than just posts on the lottery results. So, in terms of the success of that it more depends on what it is you're actually posting or what information you're going to be putting out there."</i> (C5R1)</li> </ul>
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**Table A4 – 2.3 – Quotations related to Club Use of Social Media.**

Table A4 – 2.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.3. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described how the club were using social media currently.

#### **2.4. Club Social Media Value**

As C5's social media manager wants awareness surrounding their matches and increased attendances from this, interaction with social media content can be seen as value because this is the content that will reach wider audiences. It is stated that



controversial content is what fans interact with more; however, based on what C5's social media manager interprets engagement as, this could be describing what people comment on, as opposed to sharing and engage with in other ways.

C5's social media manager identifies that social media is a key source of information for fans of the club – this is the primary use for social media at the club, or the overall goal for its use. He also describes the benefits of social media to the club as a channel for getting this information out to an audience, in it being quickly dispersed, and engaging a wider audience than websites. One way in which this awareness is raised is the process of “tagging” contacts on social media. C5's social media manager describes this and states that the awareness gained through this engagement has a noticeable impact on attendances. He also notes that there have been impacts from the promotion of content on social media, and further adds to this by arguing that it is necessary to keep constantly reminding people of what is on offer, or the information that is desired.

A key benefit of reaching a wider audience with its content is recognised by C5's social media manager. Also, how it manages to reach people who were not specifically looking for the information is noted. This is advantageous when considering the potential for increasing attendance by new fans or consumers. C5's social media manager states people need to see content multiple times to retain the information; therefore, the more often that people interact with content, and non-consumers see it on social media, the greater the likelihood of retaining this awareness and developing interest in attending will be. He also notes that images have a greater impact on viewership of content.

Topic	Evidence
Club Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“If something was quite controversial – people weren’t happy with, or a good result, a good news post, then yeah people would interact more with each other on the FB page than the Twitter page.” (C5R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think in terms of the age of going on websites as such has gone – fallen by the wayside. So obviously you’re getting your information out there to a wider range of people as opposed to them having to go and</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>search for the information themselves. So, you're able to get the news out quicker than you would be in terms of a website and are able to engage a much wider audience in terms of the impact of that news. So I mean the news spreads a lot faster on social media."</i> (C5R1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"For example, we've had a couple of Friday night games recently so you do get people tagging their friends or their mates in the post when they go up. I mean the last couple of Friday night attendances have been quite big compared to what they normally would have been, so I would say that has had some sort of impact on what the attendance would have been at the games generally."</i> (C5R1)</li> <li>• <i>"I mean there is certain – there is proof that when you do try to push, do try to promote these things that it can work. Now, it's not necessarily just posting it once or twice - you do need to almost ram it down people's throats, but you need to make sure you keep on posting it to drum the interest up and keep it fresh in people's minds."</i> (C5R1)</li> <li>• <i>"It has the ability to touch a much wider audience than what a normal website does because it's there for people to see even if they're not looking to source that news. If they have an interest in it, they can view it. So, you're going to get the news out to people a lot quicker – there is a visual impact of it as well; I mean if you are using the likes of GIFs, or you are using the likes of images, there is an impact on that. I mean I think social media has the ability to – I mean if you had a fan base online, there is the ability to bring some of that fan base to the matches in the future."</i> (C5R1)</li> </ul>
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**Table A4 – 2.4 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Value.**

Table A4 – 2.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.4. These quotations provide information on how the club representative interpreted the value which the club was experiencing from its social media use.

## 2.5. Social Media Issues

When discussing the limitations for using social media, C5's social media manager identifies that no budget exists for marketing. It is identified that this has limited the use of boosted posts – paid advertising, through these channels.

Topic	Evidence
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Social Media Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“We don’t have a budget as such. I mean there is no budget. In terms of Facebook page – the page is just a normal Facebook page. I do get the notification for it, sometimes you can buy boost credits on Facebook.” (C5R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A4 – 2.5 – Quotations related to Social Media Issues.**

Table A4 – 2.5 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.5. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described issues they experienced in their use of social media at the club.

### **3.0.Summary of Findings**

C5F1 for C5 was classed as a Social Devotee due to attendance level and reasons for attendance at matches. In relation to value, he uses social media for information and match coverage. He states that fans who attend less matches will receive greater value from match coverage than those who are more attached or allegiant. He draws comparisons between NIFL (semi-professional) and Premier League (elite) clubs, highlighting that NIFL clubs should learn from them, as Premier League clubs can be considered best practice. C5F2 is a Casual Follower of C5. He uses Instagram as a channel, and states that use of images from clubs is key to engagement. He describes exciting content as that which motivates him to engage. C5 have a team of four individuals in charge of social media. Their social media manager identifies differences in levels of engagement from fans based on platform. The respondent discusses using social media to increase attendances through generation of awareness among fans. They recognise the potential in social media being used to reach potential fans in addition to existing followers with content.

### **Appendix Five: Case Seven – C7**

The case study of C7 had 2 in-depth interviews with fans of the club. One in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with the social media manager at C7. C7 was case seven of eight, and referred to as C7.

#### **1.0. Stage One: Fan Interviews**

This section presents the findings from fan interviews conducted to meet RO1 and RO3. In total, two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in the case of C7

### 1.1. Fan Classification

C7F1 states that he will attend more than half of C7's games per season – one every other week and the mid-week matches. This includes travelling to away matches, where he names some of the further locations as places he has visited. He is not currently a season ticket holder of the club. Both C7F1 and C7F2 are classed as Fans in regards to their loyalty level to the club. C7F2 discusses how in the past he would have travelled to the majority of away matches, implying that he was a Committed Supporter of the club. He attends ten to fifteen games per season and therefore has dropped into the Fan category.

Topic	Evidence
Fan Classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“Twice a month now because I work two Saturdays on and then two off so I go at least twice a month. And then the mid-week matches as well – as many as possible really.” (C7F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“Yeah I would travel to most of them actually. I’ve been to some far places like Ballinamallard, Warrenpoint is a long journey as well. So yeah I’d travel to most of the away matches.” (C7F2)</i></li><li>• <i>“Yeah I was a season ticket holder... 2013/14 it was. Was a season ticket holder that one year – I haven’t been since but I probably will after I finish university, I’m going back to my home.” (C7F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“Not recently. But about 2 or 3 years ago I would have followed them to near enough every single away match.” (C7F2)</i></li><li>• <i>“Last year I went to about 10 or 15 – usually midweek games.” (C7F2)</i></li></ul>

**Table A5 – 1.1 – Quotations related to Fan Classification.**

Table A5 – 1.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.1. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were classified into a particular fan category.

### 1.2. Social Media Behaviour

Both C7F1 and C7F2 are active users of social media, as they would regularly post content to one or more channels, or regularly engage with content that clubs provide. C7F1 states that he has both Facebook and Twitter, but would be a more regular user of Facebook in terms of active use. C7F2 on the other hand identifies that he prefers

Twitter to Facebook. When discussing the reason why, he proposes that it is easier to use and he prefers how up-to-date the content is when compared to Facebook.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I’m not really as big on Facebook...I just prefer Twitter, it’s easier to use. Like pages aren’t kept up to date as much as Twitter – so I stay on Twitter most of the time.” (C7F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yeah I’m on Facebook and Twitter.” (C7F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I regularly would post on Facebook – Twitter not so much. But Facebook maybe every two days or so.” (C7F1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A5 – 1.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Behaviour.**

Table A5 – 1.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.2. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents used social media.

### 1.3. Social Media Value

C7F1 states that while he primarily uses Facebook, he finds Twitter better for receiving fast information. This identification of speed – or timeliness – in content is the form of value that is sought. In relation to specific content, he uses social media for match updates, and identifies that greater detail in this equates to greater value. In terms of club information he uses Facebook, but for live updates he uses Twitter. He also experiences banter as value on social media. C7F2 also highlights that match information and updates are important, as they allow him to follow the match without being at the stadium. He states more forms of information that provide value, such as ticket and travel information. Likewise, he identifies that banter between fans and social interaction is a major benefit available through social media. He also states that sometimes supporter-run pages on social media can provide more beneficial information regarding the club than the official channel.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“It would be Facebook and Twitter or the BBC Sport NI online – but mostly Twitter I find is the best one because it updates quite quick.” (C7F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The live commentary mostly – so what would be happening in the match, the main points – free kicks or challenges, or yellow cards things like that you know?” (C7F1)</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Yeah definitely. I think just seeing the score line is quite...sort of boring really. You need like updates on what is happening, the main talking points.” (C7F1)</li> <li>• “That would be more Facebook based – I think the Twitter it’s not so much I would find – for Facebook its more for that sort of thing. Twitter is more of a live commentary – match thing I would prefer to go to.” (C7F1)</li> <li>• “A bit of banter of course, and sometimes it isn’t. Sometimes it can just be general chat you know – serious chat on the matches about each team.” (C7F1)</li> <li>• “Team information and like, say on a Saturday when I’m playing football myself – I like to read through tweets and get summaries of what’s been on in the match. Ticket information and travel arrangements – if there’s any – say going to a – for example last night, going to a Northern Ireland match, the traffic in Belfast – you need to be kept up to date with it throughout the game – things like that.” (C7F2)</li> <li>• “No – 90 percent of the time the best information I get is off the fan pages. That’s just for C7 like, I don’t know about any other teams.” (C7F2)</li> <li>• “Local teams would say “we’re playing X team at this time” and then you don’t hear from them again for like 3 days and then they give the team sheets out and there’s nothing. Its only when it’s coming up to big games and they tweet out information about tickets. When it’s coming up to playing, say Ballinamallard at Windsor Park, there’s no information on the official site on how to get tickets – they don’t tell you whether its pay at the gate or you need tickets. I usually find that on the fan channels.” (C7F2)</li> <li>• “I have people I’m friendly with on Twitter and they’re other fans so we have a good bit of banter that goes on for an hour or two after.” (C7F2)</li> <li>• “Anything on Twitter especially is just fans talking to each other more than anything.” (C7F2)</li> </ul>
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**Table A5 – 1.3 – Quotations related to Social Media Value.**

Table A5 – 1.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.3. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents experienced value through their social media use.

#### **1.4. Motives to Engage**

C7F1 states that his primary reason for engaging with content on social media is that if it relates to him, or if it's something that portrays his opinions or beliefs. This shows recognition of the impact of social media content on personal image – and illustrates that if he is interested in the content specifically it would motivate engagement. C7F2 highlights that engaging and interacting with other fans through banter is his primary motivation. This would relate to his self-identification with the club, and using it to compete with rival fans. He further notes that content which is interesting to him, original or fun can motivate engagement. Like C7F1 he identifies that the content must be his opinion, recognising how personal image can be conveyed through social media content that is engaged with.

Topic	Evidence
Motives to Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“If it relates to me – and would be something I would say or want to post really.” (C7F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Then obviously if you get a big win over a rival it's good to wind other fans up – things like that.” (C7F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If somebody retweets something it's – my opinion is if you retweet something and put it out there it's something that you want to discuss with somebody.” (C7F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If it interests me I think other people will be interested – or I'm forcing people into biting on some funny story.” (C7F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If it's interesting – if it's engaging towards fans that would be the main thing. If it's not like the same generic stuff they put out all the time – if it's something like unique, and it's like fun. That's what you're gonna - you share stuff like that – if it catches the eye where like, even with Twitter I find myself scrolling through stuff really quickly and if nothing catches my eye then I don't really read it – so it's like originality really, that would be my answer.” (C7F2)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A5 – 1.4 – Quotations related to Motives to Engage.**

Table A5 – 1.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.4. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were motivated to engage with social media content.

## **2.0. Stage Two Club Interviews**

This section presents the findings from club representative interviews conducted to meet RO2 and RO3. In total, one in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted in the case of C7

## 2.1. Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources

C7's social media manager states that only he and another individual are in charge of social media at the club. He later identifies a third volunteer who operates the website and is in charge of analytics at the club. This is a small amount considering the size of support that C7 have within the league. The club use both Facebook and Twitter as social media channels.

Topic	Evidence
Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“So basically there’s two guys who do sort of match days, with myself, and another guy Jamie, Jamie does match reports, I now do sort of....I do the Facebook and Twitter, mostly Twitter....generally we only really put out Facebook updates , the teams, half time score and full time score.” (C7R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A5 – 2.1 – Quotations related to Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources.**

Table A5 – 2.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.1. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described their role, the social media channels used at the club, and the available resources.

## 2.2. Social Media Objectives and Purpose

When asked about the club's objectives for social media, C7's social media manager identified that the club wanted the content to be positive, and to avoid anything negative about the club. Elaborating on this, he described what was meant by stating that even a poor quality match needed to sound appealing, as they wanted to attract people to attend matches. From this it can be said that the club has two primary motives for social media use, or goals it wishes to achieve. Firstly, the club wants to portray a positive brand image of both itself and its product (the football etc.). Secondly, there is a desire to attract potential fans to the stadium. This shows that the club desire monetary value as a result of marketing communications on their social media channels, and therefore have their own interests other than provision of fan value.



In relation to analytics and targets, it is stated that there are no formal objectives or goals set. This causes limitations, as significant amounts of data are gained that can be used to tailor content, or make social media use more effective.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Objectives and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I mean we’re obviously were told...unofficially, off the record, to be as positive as possible. Nothing negative about the club.” (C7R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yeah we’re kind of told to be as positive as possible even if it’s...say I’m reporting for a match that’s a really bad 0-0 draw in torrential rain, we’re kind of meant to make the match sound as good as possible – obviously we’re trying to attract people to the club and trying to attract supporters through the gate...so we were told to try and be as positive as possible and paint matches...that maybe they’re not the best, in as an exciting way as possible as well.” (C7R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Not strategically – I mean there’d be no sort of formal “aww you’ve got 100 retweets today” or whatever...it would be more on a kind of informal basis...There’s no – we don’t have any formalised analysis of the stats – we do have analytics on the site and then we would have the analytics of the Facebook and Twitter – but there’s nothing formal done on it – no.” (C7R1)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A5 – 2.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Objectives and Purpose.**

Table A5 – 2.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.2. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described the social media objectives and purpose for its use within the club.

### **2.3. Club Use of Social Media**

C7 are another club highlighting the importance of remaining professional on social media; this is further validation of the importance of brand image on social media. The respondent also identifies that a younger generation may be engaging on social media. He does expand on this point by stating that the vast majority of young fans will be on social media and therefore can be reached with content and communication from the club on these channels. He also mentions potential fans as being on social media – while not directly targeting them, shared content can lead to increased awareness among non-consumers, or potential fans as referred to here.

C7's social media manager discusses using one of the features of Facebook – creation of events, and ties this in with the idea of increasing awareness of fixtures. This is elaborated on later, whereby it can appear on the social media networks of those who do not follow the club, and potentially will develop interest in match attendance through a social aspect (social value for fans). When discussing fan value and what fans interact with, he states that having an image, or making small changes for fans can increase the value which they receive. He describes this as being able to “add to the experience”, but adds that there is room for improvement in marketing the club through social media. He also that fans appreciate interesting content – therefore identifying that social media content must have purpose and value for the fans.

One of the ways in which the club strategically uses social media (like the majority of other cases have identified) is through the timing of content “to get a better response”. By better response, C7's social media manager means higher levels of viewership or engagement with the post, which leads back to increased levels of awareness or potential awareness among the audience. Building on this, he identifies that social media can be used to promote the multiple revenue streams available from the club. Again the wording here, “won't hurt matters if it's done right” identifies the need for strategy in use of social media for marketing communications. When asked about focusing on getting engagement with content, C7's social media manager describes that an ideal time for the club to focus on this is through kit launches. This is because sharing and engagement will generate greater awareness around the event. He also discusses that this will lead to greater sales and therefore more revenue – and directly links shared content on social media with maximising revenue. It can be seen that there are clear business motives behind social media use in C7.

Topic	Evidence
Club Use of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Never anything negative or controversial – never anything having a direct go at any other clubs as such, trying to be as professional as possible even though we are all volunteers like, but just to try and portray the most professional approach possible.” (C7R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Mainly to engage the younger generation as well....Irish league clubs traditionally would sort of attract people from a more of a kind of vintage...but we've seen in recent seasons there has been like sort of a lot of younger folk coming through the gates</i></li> </ul>

	<p>and by in large those fans would be mostly – 99.9% of them are on social media. So the way you’re going to reach out to these people is through social media, and even engaging non-fans – or potential fans – that is...it is a big job to be on the likes of Facebook and Twitter because you just have such a wider reach than you would from your website.” (C7R1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The sort of Facebook event side of things where it comes up in your news feed – such and such is going to C7 versus Carrick Rangers this Saturday at Taylor’s Avenue, kick off 3pm. It sort of makes an event out of everything – I don’t think there’s a specific target age range of people or specific target group – it’s just whoever’s on – the more the merrier.” (C7R1)</li> <li>• “I mean certainly timing I think sometimes is very, very important... I think sometimes there is and sometimes there isn’t...I mean speaking about timings, if things are timed in certain ways to get a better response.” (C7R1)</li> <li>• “I think if you use it wisely and anything you do post is prevalent – it’s important – I think people sort of appreciate that more. So sometimes I think less is more in that respect but at the same time sometimes during matches when you’re doing a text commentary you don’t want large periods of time without tweeting anything – you want it to sound as interesting as possible.” (C7R1)</li> <li>• “Sometimes it’s good to look into how other clubs do it – even like professional clubs from across the water...and there’s sort of tips and ideas of things that you can do that maybe you’re not doing...but I think it kind of comes with experience as well. When you’ve been doing it for so long it’s easy to get stuck in a rut and do it your way and think your way is the best – but I think from taking heed of what other people are doing well – sometimes that could be of benefit for you.” (C7R1)</li> <li>• “Someone’s scored a goal posting a picture of them as well as saying such and such has scored...things like that and putting the teams up on – tweeting like a picture of the teams before the game where you stick the formation up as well. Although they’re small I think they are appreciated by the fans and they add to the whole experience a bit more. In terms of kind of...marketing the club, there’s always things you can do I’m sure.” (C7R1)</li> <li>• “So even like using the social media to kind of advertise a sale that you have on your online shop</li> </ul>
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	<p><i>or whatever, it's going to up your conversion – it certainly won't hurt matters if it's done right.” (C7R1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The likes of kit launches they would market them and do sneak peek reveals of the kit like a week before it was due to be released. And I think in that sense whenever you're tweeting stuff about a kit launch, for example, you are keen for people to share it and like it – or do whatever, comment on it because you want to have that interest, because shirt sales are going to be revenue through the door. So that's a good example of how you'd be keen for people to share what you're posting – to maximise revenue from certain things.” (C7R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A5 – 2.3 – Quotations related to Club Use of Social Media.**

Table A5 – 2.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.3. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described how the club were using social media currently.

#### **2.4. Club Social Media Value**

C7's social media manager states that they use social media to engage with fans, but then elaborates on the benefit of social media being to reach a wider audience. This has links to communicative value and increasing awareness of the brand and offering. One of the key benefits of social media noted by C7's social media manager is that it can create awareness and subsequent interest in the club from people who would not have had prior knowledge. The club are evidently using social media to achieve marketing objectives, even if these are not formalised.

By increasing awareness of the club, there may people who will attend and develop an affiliation that are interested in other football clubs which aren't competing against C7. Social media, and the awareness in a wider audience that it can generate facilitates this process, and makes interaction feasible. However, there are no definitive examples given by the respondent. The benefit of social media in facilitating extended revenue streams (such as shirt sales) leading to monetary value is also recognised. C7's social media manager briefly described the process, or his logic behind why this is the case: fans who follow the club on social media will be made continuously aware throughout the year of their offerings and brand – and this may develop into interest in either attendance or shirt sales.

When discussing the impact of social media on awareness he states that it cannot have a negative impact on it – and any awareness that leads to even a slight increase in attendance is beneficial to the club. When elaborating upon this, he states that even an increase of 100 spectators would be beneficial. Discussing the impact of social media on attendance, C7 highlights something that other clubs also mentioned – it is difficult to quantify the exact impact because the clubs are unaware of whether the attendees are there because of social media. He then said that because of this lack of knowledge there may be an impact on the analysis of data collected.

Topic	Evidence
Club Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I think it’s,...to engage with fans yeah, but I think because it’s sort of overreaching I think that’s why it’s huge...it’s all very well using our own website to do stuff but the reason why we have APIs to farm the stuff out to social media is because it has such a bigger reach than our website would.” (C7R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The fact that it obviously attracts such a wide ranging audience – so people – I mean people can be attracted or have knowledge of the club that previously maybe wouldn’t...it generates interest.” (C7R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“People could be on to follow C7 on Twitter or Facebook – whereas previously they wouldn’t. So they would have more knowledge of the club throughout the year – and you never know you might get a few shirt sales.” (C7R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“You could have fans from other clubs who maybe don’t have an affiliation to other clubs in Northern Ireland becoming interested – you never know C7 could be my Northern Ireland club – so yeah I think it’s just the benefits wise – it’s just reaching out to the wider audience, and globalising the club in that sense. Whereas maybe it wouldn’t have been the same maybe ten years ago whenever the various social media outlets weren’t available to us.” (C7R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I think there’s definitely going to be more awareness – there’s certainly not going to be less. I think it’s important to use social media outlets as best as possible because an extra like 100 spectators paying a tenner each – that’s an extra grand through the door – it’s not to be sniffed at.” (C7R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“It’s hard to quantify that in a football stance because you don’t know how – you don’t know what</i></li> </ul>

	<i>your actual transaction is – you don't know if the person coming through the gate has been attracted because they've been on the Facebook page – it's hard to tell. So I think that's probably why there's no formalised analysis of the stats in that respect.” (C7R1)</i>
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**Table A5 – 2.4 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Value.**

Table A5 – 2.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.4. These quotations provide information on how the club representative interpreted the value which the club was experiencing from its social media use.

## **2.5. Social Media Issues**

Two major issues are identified by C7's social media manager. Firstly, due to the reliance on volunteers, there is a recognised lack of time. There is also no budget for social media use, elaborating on this by stating the primary issue is a lack of personnel. Secondly, the difficulty in quantifying the impact of social media on attendance and revenue have been identified as issues. An impact is recognised, which occurs through the interaction and sharing of content that reaches a wider audience who do not follow the club: “down to reaching fans we wouldn't have reached out to beforehand”. While he cannot give evidence of this occurring, he does state that it will not have a negative impact on gate receipts.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Social Media Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“It's hard to quantify that really...I'd say maybe you probably do get an increase in sort of gate based on stuff that's put out on social media – something I mentioned earlier about the whole event thing – say “aww Joe Bloggs there, he's going to the match on Saturday maybe I'll go as well” – tagging your friends on it saying “aww are you going?” and thinking “I wasn't going to go but I might go now seeing your man's going”. Possibly that is down to the use of social media, and possibly that is down to reaching out to fans who possibly we wouldn't have reached out to beforehand – before social media. I'd say it wouldn't have a negative impact on people through the gates certainly.” (C7R1)</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Sometimes it’s not so much lack of time, it’s lack of resource in terms of personnel because the clubs based mostly on volunteers...you’re relying on people being available and obviously if they’re not getting remunerated for it then they’re not going to be as...well I’m not saying they’re not going to be as keen but it’s not the same as...it’s not the same as your actual job where you’re getting a salary for it you’re kind of relying on good will nearly.” (C7R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A5 – 2.5 – Quotations related to Social Media Issues.**

Table A5 – 2.5 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.5. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described issues they experienced in their use of social media at the club.

### **3.0.Summary of Findings**

Two fans of C7 were interviewed for case seven. They both can be classed as Fans of the club, with one having previously been a Committed Supporter based on attendance. Both respondents identified as active users of social media – C7F1 showed preference for Facebook, while C7F2 preferred Twitter. Information was a key value for both when using social media, and it was identified that level of detail and timeliness of this improved perceived value. C7F1 engaged with content that reflected his personal views or opinion, showing self-identification as a motive. C7F2 engaged with content for social value, and self-identification when his team were successful. C7’s social media manager recognises brand image as important when using social media. He also identified the desire to attract potential fans to the stadium as a secondary purpose. C7 utilise timing of posts to increase engagement levels, showing some underlying strategy. It is identified that awareness is the key value C7 realise when utilise social media. The key issues are consistent with other cases, being limited time and lack of budget.

## Appendix Six: Case Eight – C8

The case study of C8 had 2 in-depth interviews with fans of the club. One in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with the social media manager at C8. C8 was case eight of eight, and referred to as C8.

### 1.0. Stage One: Fan Interviews

This section presents the findings from fan interviews conducted to meet RO1 and RO3. In total, two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in the case of C8

#### 1.1. Fan Classification

In relation to fan classification, C8F1 fits into the category of Committed Supporter due to attending the majority of matches in the season. He states that he does not necessarily purchase a season ticket each year. When discussing what matches he misses, he says that it is a mix between home and away, stating that travel to away matches is not an issue or influencing factor in not attending. C8F2 fits within the category of Casual Follower of C8. He states that the reason for his lack of attendance is in difficulty with travel as he has recently moved to England. C8F2 is also a passive user of social media.

Topic	Evidence
Fan Classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“Not last season but I hope to be this season coming.” (C8F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“Most weeks. I think I missed about maybe...5/6 games in the season.” (C8F1)</i></li><li>• <i>“Probably since I was about – primary school age – maybe 8, 9, 10.” (C8F2)</i></li><li>• <i>“Not so much now but really it was every two to three months really...when I was a bit younger.” (C8F2)</i></li><li>• <i>“Recently I moved to England so it’s not really convenient to travel back but I was going up until 2-3 years ago.” (C8F2)</i></li><li>• <i>“I like things occasionally...I’m not that active on social media so I don’t care very much but I do like some statuses.” (C8F2)</i></li></ul>

**Table A6 – 1.1 – Quotations related to Fan Classification.**



Table A6 – 1.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.1. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were classified into a particular fan category.

## 1.2. Social Media Behaviour

In terms of social media usage, C8F1 identifies that he primarily uses Facebook as a channel, noting that he has only recently started to use Twitter. His primary motivation for using social media was to keep in touch with people – but also to follow C8 news and scores. As a fan, he has also set up a Fan page for C8 which provides its followers with news coming from the club. C8F1 also interacts with content regularly, and therefore can be seen as an active user. However, he identifies that most active use of social media will be through his fan page for C8 as opposed to his personal profile. C8F2 follows C8 solely on Facebook. He also identifies that he uses Instagram and Snapchat as social media channels. His primary uses for social media are to follow sports and to socialise with friends.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Mostly Facebook – I’ve started using Twitter in the last few weeks.” (C8F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I started using it to keep in touch with or keep in contact with family and friends that have maybe moved abroad or moved further away...but just as important was the fact that I could follow C8 team news, and more or less club news.” (C8F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I just started a Facebook fan page – fanzine page and I got some of the supporters to like that page and I post up, they maybe comment on the page, on the posts – sometimes I comment on their posts.” (C8F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Obviously the way it works, not everything that’s posted comes up on my news feed but anything that does come up on my newsfeed that I would see from the club or players or the supporters, if I see it most of the time I would interact with it, like, comment on it.” (C8F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I try not to put too much up on Facebook myself, well maybe it’s a deliberate avoidance but sometimes I don’t really want to clutter other people’s news feeds up with lots of rubbish and then they start to maybe ignore some of what I think is more important.” (C8F1)</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“It’s (Facebook) the only thing I follow them on.” (C8F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I use FB mostly and Instagram and Snapchat.” (C8F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Keeping up with what friends from school are doing – following other sports – I follow some rugby pages and some motor sports – F1, I’m really just keeping up with...catching up with people.” (C8F2)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A6 – 1.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Behaviour.**

Table A6 – 1.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.2. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents used social media.

### **1.3. Social Media Value**

C8F1 identifies that information is the primary value he seeks in the club’s social media. When discussing this, he states that he pays more attention if it is of interest to him. He also states that social interaction with other fans is an area of value. It is not clear whether he means fellow supporters of C8 or banter with opposing fans; however, it does identify that he experiences social value. In addition to this, it can be said that he also experiences value through self-identification as he runs a fan page for the club, showing his attachment to C8. C8F2 identifies that his main value on social media from C8 is in information. This is both in match results and in transfer news.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Information from the club and about the club, as well as the actual social interaction with other fans. I mean some of the players on Facebook.” (C8F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If I see it’s something that is sort of...of interest to me then I’ll read further. Same if it’s from someone else that I don’t know.” (C8F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I check them on Facebook – they come up on my FB page.” (C8F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I like to see who the new players are, and mainly what the scores – how they are doing in matches.” (C8F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“It’s mostly information – I’m not so interested in their events and things that they advertise.” (C8F2)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A6 – 1.3 – Quotations related to Social Media Value.**

Table A6 – 1.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.3. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents experienced value through their social media use.

#### 1.4. Motives to Engage

C8F1 engages with content through liking and sharing. He has a clear purpose in doing so; through engaging with the content he feels like he is promoting the club. This is another way in which value may have been experienced, as there are links to club attachment in this behaviour. He identifies that through his engagement with content there is potential for it to have an impact on the awareness levels of non-consumers. He furthers this by stating that it is positive news and information regarding the club he engages with; this implies recognition of brand image and the association of positive news with a positive image. He also recognises that individuals who do not follow the club may not get the information, so he acts as an alternative source. As a passive user of social media, C8F2 identifies that in sport if he finds something humorous he will engage with it. Outside of sport, he will interact with content from his peers if they are celebrating.

Topic	Evidence
Motives to Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“I like and share it, especially if I think it can help promote the club...if I can sort of put the club into people’s mind-sets, especially maybe people that don’t usually look at C8 football club, or any information about it.” (C8F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Yeah, yeah it is to raise awareness.” (C8F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The fanzine page I usually try to use it to put out positive news about the club, trying to promote the club...either like a match preview trying to encourage people to go to the match on the weekend, or just to let people know information about the club. Some people might not get the information from the club themselves, but they might get it from my fanzine page.” (C8F1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Well on the sports side of it – it’s a positive result or if it’s something funny I enjoy.” (C8F2)</i></li> <li>• <i>“It’s generally funny things or say a friend is celebrating something – that would get a ‘like’.” (C8F2)</i></li> </ul>

**Table A6 – 1.4 – Quotations related to Motives to Engage.**

Table A6 – 1.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 1.4. These quotations provide information on how the fan respondents were motivated to engage with social media content.

## 2.0. Stage Two Club Interviews

This section presents the findings from club representative interviews conducted to meet RO2 and RO3. In total, one in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted in the case of C8

### 2.1. Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources

The social media team at C8 consists of six individuals. Facebook and Twitter are the two primary social media channels; however, C8 have also started to use Instagram in an official capacity. The club have taken on board an unofficial, fan-run account for Instagram as they have recognised the potential of this platform; and with not having to increase the workload of volunteers, this could be advantageous if used strategically.

C8's social media manager has recognised that there are differences in the audience on their different social media channels – stating that those who follow on Twitter are “hardcore” fans – or in terms of this research, those showing higher levels of loyalty and allegiance to the club. He also states that because Facebook is seen as fairweather fans – or less loyal, that they will promote matches at an increased rate through Facebook. This recognition has developed into a somewhat strategic approach to social media use – as they have identified different audiences, they are able to manage better the resource allocation to each of these and are tailoring the intent, and possibly content to achieve different goals based on this. C8's social media manager sees Facebook as greater potential for receiving monetary value through improved attendances, while they will concentrate on communication and developing fan value through providing information via Twitter.

Topic	Evidence
Respondent Role, Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Basically there's one guy runs the Facebook, one runs the Twitter, one runs Instagram one runs the website and I would sort of tie them all in. So would</li> </ul>

Channels, and Resources	<p><i>you call that a coordinator a media coordinator?” (C8R1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“We use Facebook and Twitter, that’s our main feed for it. But we did try snapchat for a while but it got lost and never really took off. Instagram – there’s a guy does Instagram as well but he’s only started so – he’s only been brought in recently as an official club media.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The amount of feedback we get is very impressive. I look at Facebook and Twitter mostly, the Twitter page is your hardcore fans whereas Facebook seems to be a lot of your fairweather fans. So that is why we target our promotions through Facebook rather than Twitter – we’ve noticed that difference between the audience. And the promotion side does get a big hit on Facebook.” (C8R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A6 – 2.1 – Quotations related to Respondent Role, Social Media Channels, and Resources.**

Table A6 – 2.1 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.1. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described their role, the social media channels used at the club, and the available resources.

## **2.2. Social Media Objectives and Purpose**

The approach to social media is flexible, mostly due to a lack of clear strategy and planning. Timing of content is targeted and planned in order to receive value across the multiple social media channels being used. C8’s social media manager has run paid advertisements unlike the other clubs – out of their own pocket, as no marketing or social media budget is available. He states that the creation of a budget might be something that can be achieved through the use of social media – again recognising that there is potential for monetary or commercial value to be realised through these channels.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Objectives and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“It is flexible...now we do for example, if we were doing any sort of official news release – we do all collaborate and go out at a peak time. We sort of found it out what times our fans or our audience is sort of wanting news at to get a bigger hit... so there is plans as in, when you target things, but as for general tweets and posts – not really, it’s more about a flexible thing. We do try and tie in the other</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>guys so they all get the same hits you know?" (C8R1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Another thing we have promoted a few of our posts on Facebook and Twitter – done ad campaigns the way you can boost the posts for so many targets for a couple of days...I've done that a couple of times out of my own pocket...so it's something I'd maybe like to see the club use to promote certain events they're running outside of the football. Even within the football who knows it could work on that...but a budget would be nice. But again that comes out of maybe creating your own budget with advertisers and sponsors or anything like that so...that's maybe a limitation." (C8R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A6 – 2.2 – Quotations related to Social Media Objectives and Purpose.**

Table A6 – 2.2 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.2. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described the social media objectives and purpose for its use within the club.

### **2.3. Club Use of Social Media**

When discussing the types of interaction they get on posts, he identifies views, likes, shares and comments. An interesting point is then made regarding negative comments – he still states that this has been a successful use of social media, because even though fans may not like the news or the message, it has at least been successfully communicated (because feedback has been received). One way in which social media should be used strategically is to implement methods of feedback, or have established systems and frameworks by which success of content can be measured.

The club is improving on their imagery used for content, and like others it is stated that there is a much greater impact of content that contains graphics than that without. In addition, match photos are a prime example of where fans will begin to interact with each other and the club. An example was given of the level of interaction that news of a player signed received. Through a high number of direct interactions with the post, there are a lot of views – this will be due to the fact it will appear on the social media of non-followers of the club (considering the club itself did not have 24000 followers). Evidence like this highlights the impact that shared content has on awareness as being highly significant. C8's social media manager runs competitions

that get engagement and are used in an attempt to build their audience because they are not happy with how many followers they currently have on their Facebook.

In terms of how the club can interact with fans on social media, he states that the Twitter is used to retweet content from fans and share it when the message is positive and appropriate. However, in relation to guidelines or social media policy there is nothing in place. This causes an issue if there are multiple volunteers using the social media. He has stated that a social media policy has been developed to tie into player contracts in order to stop the club having to deal with potential negative publicity through player actions.

Topic	Evidence
Club Use of Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Views, likes, shares, comments and the number of comments too. Sometimes even though it’s a negative comment, it’s not a great post to make, it’s still a successful post because you’ve communicated something with your audience.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“After we post an album of all the pictures of the match and for some reason it’s become the biggest area where everybody talks how the match went. Now the Facebook we post the result of the match straight after the match – but nobody comments under it, they all wait til the album comes out.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“He’s singed for us again, and...actually it is impressive, within minutes – within maybe 2 hours we had an unbelievable amount of interaction with it – more than I’ve ever seen. I took a screenshot, within 3 hours he had 24000 people saw this post. Which is massive...450 likes, 107 comments, that would have been within a few hours – so people got the news that they loved and reacted to it. So it does show the potential.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“If it’s a like and share completion yes definitely. We do kind of run that because our Facebook page – we’re not happy with the amount of likes we have.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The Twitter guy shares nearly every post I make – again he only shares positive stuff. It’s hard to share something that’s maybe negative, but...yeah he would share reactions and stuff – especially from players as well.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“We are working on just making our graphics better because again we find posts with pictures do 10 times better than posts without. So we try to create</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>a picture with everything we post. Our pictures, our graphics were a bit schoolboyish for a while, but we are trying to get better, just improve ourselves and that.” (C8R1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The club have zero media policy whatsoever...just on that I have personally put together a social media policy for the club and I’m trying to push through for all the players and officials contracts... to make them all sign it, and volunteers because it’s an issue that’s come up before where a few players have posted political things...and fans sometimes agree sometimes they don’t, but it creates an issue that we shouldn’t have to face.” (C8R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A6 – 2.3 – Quotations related to Club Use of Social Media.**

Table A6 – 2.3 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.3. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described how the club were using social media currently.

#### **2.4. Club Social Media Value**

C8’s social media manager describes interacting with fans as value; as a fan, they benefit from both interacting between themselves and with the club. He also notes the issue of needing to maintain a professional approach when interacting. This links to brand image and the message that is conveyed through social media behaviour of the club. He states that there will always be some form of interaction (or more specifically sharing) on content because fans of the team share positive information, and fans of opposing teams share negative information or news about the club. This ties into the category of fan value and banter/competition between supporters, through self-identification with their clubs. People will show greater levels of attachment to the club if there is interaction – this links the club process of interaction, with a specific form of resultant fan value. Furthermore he states that specific kinds of content give this value of attachment to fans, specifically mentioning “behind the scenes”.

One of the primary benefits the club sees from social media is through it becoming the primary source for communicating with fans – and the first source of information for fans. This will increase fan value, and it is stated that it builds up increased levels of trust from supporters. A major area of improvement for the club from social media has been through its communication – he states that (due to the nature of social media channels) there is now two-way communication between club and fans. C8’s social



media manager also notes that in the past there was no interaction with fans between games. As has been identified through this research, interaction is a significant form of fan value and where lacking will cause fan dissatisfaction.

Another benefit identified is through promotion and increasing awareness of the club, consequently developing interest in attending matches. C8's social media manager links this with competitions and giveaways on social media – and acknowledges that it can have an impact on attendance by making people interested. Again it is noted that communicating with fans develops trust – and allows them to see what's going on behind the scenes. He gives an example of when social media has had a direct impact on attendance at a match – it created awareness in a lapsed fan of the club, and developed enough interest for him to commit to attending.

Topic	Evidence
Club Social Media Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“It’s nice for people to get that interaction with other fans – and the club sometimes. Sometimes I’ve had to bite as well. But maybe I shouldn’t– you try to be as professional as you can when you post comments – and the other group comments as well. It’s nice to see people interacting.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“The things we’ve always had a problem with somewhat was basic communication. So the news would come in via different outlets – be it Belfast telegraph, and other established places rather than coming from the club itself. We’ve sort of tried to tighten that up with setting up media teams to make sure news comes through the club first... so that was my main goal – to get trust within the club and make it look professional.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“Of course promotion – the more people see your post, the more people are going to mind there’s a club round the corner. And we did that for our Boxing Day fixtures and the big games we’ve run competitions and we’ve run giveaways and stuff... so the potential is there – people then think “there’s a match on wanna go?” So you’re promoting yourself – selling yourself. And as well the trust things, communication with your fans, its broadening your communication with people that don’t normally see what’s going on.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“There was a guy sent a message to the Facebook page over the Christmas period and said that he wouldn’t have went – that he saw it was on and he sort of gave it a go, he hadn’t been in years.” (C8R1)</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Yeah people do share your posts – they share them generally when there’s good news, and the opposition fans share them when it’s bad news so you always get some form of shares.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“It’s the communication. I feel that...it was a major complaint from all the fans for years and years and it’s the one big improvement that we have had now. We have a two way communication in the club with fans and before it was – you couldn’t imagine, no communication with them until the next match.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“I personally have seen it – people become closer to the club because of that open communication.” (C8R1)</i></li> <li>• <i>“By getting these behind the scenes access interviews and sort of clips, you’re getting that feel of...attachment again I think.” (C8R1)</i></li> </ul>
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**Table A6 – 2.4 – Quotations related to Club Social Media Value.**

Table A6 – 2.4 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.4. These quotations provide information on how the club representative interpreted the value which the club was experiencing from its social media use.

## **2.5. Social Media Issues**

C8’s social media manager describes some of the struggles and issues of social media within the club, in that board members do not see the value, and therefore it is difficult to be set higher-level objectives and goals. As a result of this they set themselves objectives, but he does not provide much detail on what these are. Similarly, in terms of the impact of paid advertising, he believes that there are too many variables impacting on whether or not it can be considered beneficial to the club. It is unclear to C8 whether the paid views may have been gained anyway without paying if the content had been interacted with and shared; and those views may not have been their target audience – those who have little potential of ever attending a match. He also states that there may need to be a large amount of capital put into paid advertising to have a noticeable impact.

A unique issue identified by C8’s social media manager occurs when interacting with fans. He states that a problem is how to keep it fair; in other words, who to interact with that won’t result in the loss of value for other fans.

Topic	Evidence
Social Media Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “You get the guys at the top who don’t really understand what we do so we have that struggle where we try and tell them how important this stuff is and we are getting somewhere...We maybe set ourselves objectives and I don’t know if we set ourselves objectives but we see how far we can push this thing – and how many new cool things we can do in a geeky kind of way.” (C8R1)</li> <li>• “It takes a wee bit of balls too because once you start interacting you can’t stop. Once you interact to one guy, you really have to interact to the next one for there to be any sort of....fairness. It’s a hard balance.” (C8R1)</li> <li>• “It’s really hard to gauge because I’d always try and keep track of our tool and keep an idea of how our post is doing all the time...and Facebook sort of show you this is how many natural views you’ve had, and this is how many paid views...and I sort of don’t know if it’s worth it because them paid views either... would they get it anyway or they aren’t really the target....so I don’t know if I’m behind it or not... Although that again depends on your budget as well because if you’re spending a lot of money you’re going to get good feedback off a big boost, whereas if you’re only spending 15 pound on a boost...it mightn’t get enough to see enough off it you know?” (C8R1)</li> </ul>

**Table A6 – 2.5 – Quotations related to Social Media Issues.**

Table A6 – 2.5 provides the quotations relating to the findings discussed in section 2.5. These quotations provide information on how the club representative described issues they experienced in their use of social media at the club.

### **3.0.Summary of Findings**

C8F1 for C8 is classed as a Committed Supporter of the club. He primarily uses Facebook as a social media channel. He is an active user of social media and runs an unofficial fan page for C8. The primary value through social media is self-identification, and his allegiance to the club shown through the operation of a fan page. He also identifies information as value. He engages with content to create awareness in others who may not see it. C8F2 is a Casual Follower of C8. He states that he uses Facebook as his only channel for following news from C8, and that he engages with content that is seen as humorous. C8 have a social media team of six individuals and

have recently adopted Instagram as an additional channel. They state that there is a lack of objectives or guidelines set by the club. It is identified that content containing images or video increases level of engagement. The primary values for the club are identified as communication, awareness and the ability to interact with fans. An issue is identified that the board do not recognise the value in social media which results in a lack of social media budget.